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Camp-Fire Yarns

By
F. H. CHELEY
Author of "Told by the Camp-Fire," "Camping with Henry," and others

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK T. MERRILL

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CAMP-FIRE YARNS

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FOREWORD

SINCE time began boys have loved a camp fire. It matters little where it is built or by whom; whether it glimmers on the shore of some beautiful lake; whether it lights the fringe of some primeval grove or blazes forth from a high and rocky promontory deep in the everlasting hills; it has the same irresistible appeal to the savage that lies buried deep in the heart of every real boy. It stirs the imagination as no other experience does. It breaks down artificial barriers of cast and class and creed and makes comrades of all who will partake of its warmth and friendly glow. It links us forever with the past and will not let us forget our ancestors of long ago who gathered nightly in its protecting circle of light to pow-wow concerning the things that would be good for man.

The boy who has never sat by a living, breathing camp fire, who has never felt its

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charm and fellowship, who has never listened to strange tales told under its magic spell or sung friendship songs in its glimmering light in company with a congenial band of kindred spirits, has never lived at all and has missed one of the purest joys of life.

The happiest hours of my boyhood were spent by the camp fire and the best stories I have ever heard have been told and retold there; and it is only because such experiences have been mine that I venture to offer this second little volume of camp-fire yarns with the hope that they may lead many boys out into the same simple wilderness to sit by a friendly camp fire to spin yarns.

F. H. C.

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THE YELLOW STREAK

Story One

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THE YELLOW STREAK

Story One

THE long camp-day was over, with its hikes and fishing. The evening meal had even been cleared away. Twilight was slowly settling in the quiet, peaceful valley. Then some one lighted the well-built little fire, high upon the green knoll just back of the tent-street, and, without bugle or shouting or signal of any kind, every camper began to slowly gravitate toward the "red flower that blossoms at night," its friendly glow and gently rising column of silver-grey smoke all the signal that was necessary, for each camper was already eager for that last quiet hour of the day, when congenial spirits gather to chat and sing, and to hear a good yarn or to meditate a bit as they gaze at the pictures the fire makes.

More than fifty happy faces could be

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counted in the circle of fire-light. The "Chief" took his usual place as near the center of things as possible, and called for quiet. Then followed the usual array of camp-fire announcements and comments on every conceivable thing, from who borrowed Spike Jones' fishing-pole and forgot to return it, to who was to go to the village the next day for the mail.

Of course they sang a bit, but, for the most part, they were too weary for much of that, and soon settled in quiet contentment, all watching the burning logs. In every sense it was a family pow-wow.

"Who's going to be the story-teller this year, 'Chief'?" asked Billy Evans, unable to hide his curiosity any longer.

"That's what I say," chimed in Jimmie Andrews. "He'll have to go some if he can tell yarns any better than old Jed. Camp-fires'll seem odd without him, I bet."

"Didn't know whether I'd come this year or not when I found old Jed wasn't to be along," drawled Bugs Par.

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"Well, it's like this, fellows," said the "Chief," a bit tantalizingly. "I've a surprise for you this year on camp-fire stories. I've asked each tent-leader to be prepared to tell at least one good yarn, and I haven't the slightest idea what they are to be about, but they will be something to look forward to, anyway, and we'll have one every night. How does that arrangement suit you?"

He was greeted by a chorus of yells, and soon every one was settling himself comfortably for the first yarn.

"Think I'll start the ball rolling myself," added the "Chief," with a smile. "I have one that I think will make an appropriate beginning. I've chosen to call it the 'Yellow Streak,' and I'll leave you to discover why. A friend of mine that conducts a large camp in Canada told me the yarn, and I presume it is pretty close to the facts. Hope you'll enjoy it as much as I did."

"Let her go," shouted the irrepressible Tommie. "I'm ready."

The "Chief" chose a comfortable place to

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perch on a near-by old stump and then began:

I

Larry Evans thrashed about restlessly in the upper deck of his canvas camp-cot. He had tried for three solid hours to settle down and sleep, but it seemed he was more wide-awake every moment—and more miserable. A dozen persistent mosquitoes buzzed ceaselessly just outside the mosquito curtain. In the calm, perfectly still night their monotonous music seemed like an orchestra to restless Larry. Finally, one of the more investigative of the "beasts" found an opening, probably made by Larry's thrashing about, and at once set to prospecting for blood on a smooth, well-developed arm that was as brown and inviting as a warm lake and a summer sun could make it. Larry suddenly rose to a sitting position and then made one wild slap for the savage bug.

"Got him," he sighed with some satisfaction; "now maybe I can sleep." But it was

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of no use, for Larry was really being kept awake by a far deeper sting than that of one lonely Canadian mosquito.

A quartet of voices floated in to him now from off the placid, moon-lit lake. He recognized the words of a popular air; also one of the voices, a feminine voice. Strangely enough, before the restless boy's mind it conjured up pictures of the little ice-cream parlor across the lake, of expensive treats, and of many instances of stolen sociability of the last few days, that deep in his heart he knew full well he could never have afforded if he hadn't had what his " worst self " had insisted on calling, a dozen times during the last two days, " a rare streak of luck."

A silvery ribbon of light danced restlessly over the shadow-painted water. He could see the canoe now and hear every voice in it as plainly as if they were on the beach instead of a mile away.

" He is a fine boy," the feminine voice said, " and he sure spends the money." There was wild laughter and the plash of paddles as the

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canoe drifted behind the long timber-clad moraine.

Larry was on his elbows, looking out wistfully. How long he remained in that position he did not know, but when he finally lay down again and pulled the blanket over his chill shoulders it was with a firm resolve that on the morrow he would sneak his little bundle of clothes down to the main road and go home. There was nothing else for him to do. He was whipped and he knew it—defeated in his own soul. For two whole days he had bluffed them all with that mysterious half-hidden smile of his that had made him beloved in the camp since his first day; bluffed everybody,—his Counselor, the Camp Leader, his best pals, even,—every one save himself; but deep in his boy heart that "wee voice" refused to be quiet and continually taunted him with "Coward, coward."

A bit of a cold shiver ran up his spine now, as he recollected how the suspicion had all naturally settled on Donnie Boyle. Donnie was never very prepossessing anyway, silent

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and gloomy, hard to know, and apparently unfriendly. He had spent considerable time by himself since coming to the camp, especially enjoying fishing alone. He had not entered into any of the athletics, not even on visitors' day, but had always been on hand to watch Larry's every performance, openly admiring his trim, well-trained, athletic body, and urging him to go in for the athletic medal and the aquatic award. Both of these Evans had won, to the great pride and satisfaction of Donnie Boyle.

"Poor Donnie," breathed Larry. "I bet he has no idea what this bunch has been saying about him these last two days. What he don't know won't hurt him. I can't imagine how I shall explain things to Mother; that's what is bothering me most. I'll fix it somehow. Gee, I wish I hadn't done it. Why is a fellow such a fool? He thinks he's getting some easy coin, but he pays three prices for every cent, besides feeling rotten inside.

"How in the Sam Hill did these pesky bugs get into my bunk? I'm going to quit this

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swiping business now for dead certain. This *is* the very last time, I swear by—by innocent Donnie Boyle." "But you've sworn before, Larry Evans," said the "wee small voice" as plain as day, and Larry instinctively raised to his shoulder to see if some one were really present. "Coward!" said the "voice," and the boy turned over restlessly.

There was a soft plash of paddles, a little thud as a canoe bumped the landing-pier, and then Larry heard voices. It was the Camp Director and the Coach. Evidently they had been paddling. They were talking in low tones, but the night was absolutely still and Larry picked up several odd words. *They were talking about him!* He heard his name. Then they did suspect him after all! No, he was mistaken; they were talking about Donnie. He could see them plainly now, and—he rose to his elbow as if startled—they had found the empty pocketbook! Was he hearing straight? How could that possibly be? Hadn't he tossed it *far* out on the water at the far side of the lake? "Found it," he

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breathed. "Oh, what a chump! I might have known *some one* would find it, and yet this lake is fully ten miles square. Why didn't I hide it deep in the big woods?" thought Larry.

"Why did you take it at all?" said the "wee voice" from somewhere. "You stole it, boy—plain thief, you!"

"They shouldn't have been so careless," countered Larry. But he was tired of arguing with that "wee voice." It had a strange keenness to its arguments, and he couldn't think of a single point of defense but what the "wee voice" promptly refuted it. "I'll go home to-morrow," thought Larry as he lay down again. "What if some of that money was marked, or what if —— Oh, shoot, I'm getting to be a regular baby and a coward. I believe there *is* a yellow streak in me, after all. I'm going to get out of this and forget all about it. I swear *I'll* never touch money, not my own, again."

The two men passed Larry's tent on their way to the Lodge, and he could hear them

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talking in low tones. How he wished that he might know just what they were saying. Perhaps he ought to go to-night. The "wee voice" laughed ironically: "Run away from it—fool, you can't."

"Larry couldn't do it, Joe, that's all there is to it," said the Camp Director. "I've known that boy for five years; clean-cut as a die. I'd trust him with anything I own. He just simply could *not* do it. The fact that he has been spending considerable money is purely circumstantial. He usually has money. He's thrifty, and then it is commonly supposed his folks are well fixed. I can't bring myself to accuse the boy. It's a mighty serious thing to be mistaken about, and I would hate to turn suspicion toward him, for suspicion is a nasty thing and often does grave injustice."

"It was either he or Donnie," said the Physical Director. "It simply must have been. Both boys were seen there only a few moments apart. I know full well I had no business whatever to leave the money on the

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desk, but I was in a hurry. Seventy dollars is grand larceny, man! Of course, it's up to me to make it good, but it's going to spoil my whole summer to know that there is a thief among this gang of splendid boys."

"Donnie acted very queer yesterday and to-day," said Mr. Thorn. "He's kept completely out of sight, and alone, but he hasn't spent a cent. I've been thinking I'd look into his trunk, but, Joe, I can't. I tell you I hate to suspect these boys. If we only had a clew I'd feel different."

"We have the pocketbook; that's clew enough that it was a camper," retorted Joe, who was nervous and irritable over the whole matter.

"Well, let's pile in; perhaps to-morrow will bring some light."

Larry awoke with the sun. Quietly he slipped out and dressed, then as quickly gathered together a few of his clothes and poked them into his hiking-bag. Pulling on his sweater, he slipped out softly and made for the lake-road that led to the main highway

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two miles farther on. The dew lay heavily on the grass. The myriads of blackbirds chattered querulously in the cat-tails as he passed. He pushed open the camp-gate, and, after pausing to gaze for a second at the peaceful camp, nestled among the sturdy oaks on the Point, he turned his back and set out for the village, his mind in a wild turmoil.

By walking fast he would catch the morning local and would be well on his way home before the camp awoke. He wondered if they would miss him. Such a thing had not occurred to him before. Suddenly it dawned upon him that his mysterious disappearance would be certain to settle the suspicion full upon him, for there must be an explanation for his unannounced departure. He was surprised at his own thick-headedness. What if they should bring him back from home to answer the charges? He hurried on much disturbed. "Why not go back and face the music?" said the little "voice."

"You must think I'm crazy," snorted Larry. "Nobody knows I took it. No, sir,

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I'll run away first; that's what I'll do. I have sixty dollars left and I could get a job with one of the farmers around here."

"But *I* know you took it, Larry," said the voice"; "and *you* know you took it, and if anybody else were to look you straight in the eye this morning, they'd know you took it, and ——"

"Oh, rats," cried Larry. "I—I wish I was dead. Anyway, I'd rather be dead than have Mother know it." He stopped, thought hard a few moments, and then turned back toward camp.

"Good for you, Larry," said the "voice." "Go back and square yourself. It's the only way in the world you'll ever be happy again. If you don't, every time you look in the mirror, every time you attempt to do something worth while, that thing will bob up and defeat you. Go back, boy, and rid yourself of the yellow streak."

Larry listened, considered, and then suddenly turned back toward the station again, defiant.

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"No, I can't do it. You make it *sound* easy, but it's the hardest thing I ever tried to do in my life. Shoot! What's a little money?"

He hurried on into the village, but, upon reaching the station, he learned that the morning train had gone through ten minutes before. There was nothing for him to do but wait for the two o'clock. Slowly he retraced his steps to a clump of heavy woods near the road where he could be alone. Somehow he didn't feel like talking to folks. Wagon after wagon rattled into the little country store and out again. He watched them come and go. Never had a morning seemed half so long before.

A dozen times he removed the roll of bills from his pocket and counted them. How he loathed the things. Once he had thrown them from him in disgust, only to gather them carefully again. At times the "wee voice" was encouraged in its fight for the boy, only to see that defiant gleam creep back into his face. Thereupon, with patience, it would

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start all over again in a fresh attack on the boy's weakness, determined that it was to be a battle to the finish.

It was nearly train time. If Larry ever boarded that train, all was lost. He sauntered over to the station, haggard, dejected, seeing no one, lonely—at camp they were just finishing dinner. He was hungry himself.

"Hi, Larry," said a friendly and familiar voice. "What you doing here? Aren't leaving us, are you?"

"Yep," said Larry ironically. "Going home."

"What's up?" went on the big farmer boy from just back of the camp.

"Tired of camp," snapped Larry, trying to escape; "poor food, nothing to do, too many restrictions and ——"

"That so?" said the farmer. "Say, Larry, listen. I hate to see you go. We need a hand on the farm bad—good pay, good eats, plenty of time to yourself, and you'd fit in fine. Hay's ready to cut and no one to help." He looked at the boy eagerly.

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"Could I earn ten dollars?" said Larry almost breathlessly, a new light in his eye.

"Several of 'em," said the young farmer; "and you can go to work to-day. Is it a bargain?"

Larry considered; he was making some very rapid calculations. The "voice" whispered: "Do it, boy, do it. It is your chance." Larry heaved a heavy sigh, as if a great load had suddenly been lifted from his shoulders.

"It's a go," he said finally. "But, say, look here, you won't ever mention the fact that you caught me over here, will you? I haven't been myself the last couple of days, and just took a notion I'd go home."

"I'll never mention it, Larry," said the farmer. "I know just how you felt. I've been homesick myself, and I don't blame you; a fellow does get all-fired restless when things don't go right. Come, now, we'll be going."

Larry tossed his bundle into the wagon and climbed on. The two chatted all the way home in merry mood, for Larry felt like a new boy. He'd earn that ten, and then ——

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He wasn't sure yet whether he'd go and confess the theft or just put the money back; but he'd do one or the other for certain,—if he could just get up enough courage.

II

The old wagon rattled down the long hill that leads to Little Carey Lake. Up on the other shore Larry could see the camp flagpole and the tops of the tents. He really experienced a sense of pleasure at coming back. Below him lay the dense cat-tail swamps in which he had hunted bullfrogs many a night. Over yonder was his own little bay, where he had caught a splendid bass only a few nights before—the largest of the season.

"Why, that's strange," said Larry suddenly to his companion. "There is a rowboat floating in the bay with no one in it. You don't suppose ——"

"Bad place to upset," said the farmer. "That bay is full of treacherous quicksand. Most got stuck in it myself one season when we were frogging."

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"What's that? What's that?" said Larry in great excitement. A faint cry of "Help" filtered through the trees to the occupants of the noisy, jolting wagon. Larry was out with a bound and off at his best speed for the back of the bay. Some one was in trouble. In a few moments he emerged through the trees and hurried to the shore.

"I'm coming," he called between puffs. "Hold on, old fellow, I'm —— Donnie," burst out Larry. "What's up? What's up?"

Fifty yards from shore Larry saw Donnie apparently standing in the shallow water up to his armpits, but the boy's face was drawn and white and he was crying wild, excited yells, waving his arms in terror.

"Oh, Larry, save me, save me! I'm in the quicksands and I'm sinking, sinking."

The farmer boy burst through the brush at this instant and took in the whole situation at a glance. Larry was already peeling off his clothes, preparatory to jumping in. "No use to swim out, Larry," said the boy; "any-

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way, it's dangerous. Stand still, Donnie; don't thrash about. Larry and I'll get a pole and scoot it out to you. No; there is only one way—we must have several boats and a wide plank. I've helped get cattle out of the mire, and I know how. Larry, you stay here to encourage him. If he stands still, he'll sink very slowly. I'll drive to camp as fast as possible and get help; but mind, Larry, don't you go in." The young farmer was gone as fast as legs could carry him.

Larry studied the whole situation carefully. If *he* could only get into that boat, but he had no wings. No, but, better yet, he had brains. He noted that a great willow extended far out over the water, and he believed one limb overhung the drifting boat, or nearly so. If not, he thought he could swing and let go, dropping into the boat. It was a chance. He was scrambling up the big tree now like a cat with a dog after it, calling to Donnie all the while to keep his head and to stand still, that they were going to save him yet. Up and up he climbed, then out on

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the swaying limbs. He could look down now almost into the boat which lay twenty-five feet below him. He wasn't afraid to drop, but he was wondering if the boat would stand the impact of his body. If he went through it, he might become entangled and drown. He had taken off his shoes to climb the better; now he did so wish that he had them on to protect his feet.

Donnie watched him in eager excitement. He was conscious of having settled several inches into the cold, sucking sand since Larry had arrived. He believed he would be under in a few more minutes. Wild fear clutched at his heart. What if Larry should miss the boat and get caught himself in the sucking sand?

Slowly the bare-footed athlete let himself down to arm's length from the bending limb. Then, with a quick jerky motion, he set the great limb to swinging. His eyes shifted from the frail boat below him to the fear-filled face of the slowly-sinking Donnie. He could hear the team rattling over the stony

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lake-road at a wild gallop, and knew that it would be some moments yet before a rescue party at the camp could be gotten under way. He felt deep in his heart that it would be too late to save the boy. Donnie was pleading with him to drop. Suddenly he let go his grip, closed his eyes for a second, and then struck the water—he had missed the boat. Instinctively he reached forward and was rewarded by grasping the gunwale. In a second he had scrambled in. Then, grasping the one oar that lay inside, he poled quickly over to where Donnie could get hold of the boat. He feared Donnie would swoon and become helpless on his hands, so, leaning over, he put an arm about the sinking, frantic boy, and tried to lift him, but to no avail. It was as if Donnie was in a plaster cast. The more he struggled, the more water rushed into the boat, until there was grave danger of capsizing it and throwing Larry also into the lake.

Larry quickly flung himself to the other side of the boat and ordered Donnie to hold

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fast to the opposite gunwale. In this way Larry thought he might lift Donnie bit by bit out of the sand, but he was doomed to disappointment. Donnie was sinking lower and lower every minute right before his eyes, and he was helpless. He listened to see if he could hear anything of the rescue party, but not a sound came over the placid water.

Suddenly a very brilliant idea flashed into Larry's mind. He recalled how, earlier in the season, they had tried to pull an old snag of a tree out of the swimming-beach, but every effort had been a failure, even a team of horses had been unable to budge it, until an old-timer had come along and explained that as the pole went into the mud it created a vacuum, and that, in order to get it out, the vacuum must be destroyed by letting air-bubbles down into the mud about it. This had been accomplished by working a slender sapling down alongside of the snag and wiggling it about violently. Two boys had then been able to pull out the old pole easily. Fortunately for Donnie Boyle, Larry Evans

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had been one of those two boys. He set to work now, prodding carefully with his oar, operating from the stern of the boat, and instructing Donnie to lift himself on the end of the boat for all he was worth, while he endeavored to break the vacuum.

Twice he thought Donnie lifted a little, but the imprisoned boy was not certain. Larry toiled on and on with the oar, thrusting it into the mud as far as he could, and as close to Donnie's leg as possible, then turning it back and forth. At last, after many futile attempts, several bubbles rose to the surface, and Larry knew that he was making progress.

"Now, old boy, pull like sixty," he encouraged the nearly exhausted camper. "Now again, and again. That's it—that's it. See! See! we're gaining. Now once more; easy, pull steady. That's it." Slowly but surely Donnie was being able to extricate himself from his clammy prison.

Larry worked persistently with his paddle. Every bubble drove him to renewed efforts.

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Finally he dropped the paddle, wound his arms about Donnie, and lifted with all his strength. Slowly the sucking sand lost its hold, until finally the two boys toppled over into the boat. Both were completely exhausted but safe.

Ten minutes later the Camp Director and the Life Saving Crew came skimming over the water, bent on a rescue, but Larry had saved the day. With tremendous shouts the two boys were towed into camp. Donnie, who was nervously exhausted, was promptly put to bed, but not until he had explained how Larry had effected his rescue by destroying the vacuum that held him in its death grip.

At camp Larry was boisterously and enthusiastically proclaimed a hero. Everybody thought he was wonderful. The younger boys crowded about in an admiring group, each with a hundred questions to ask. Wild excitement reigned. Some one had suggested that they have a special celebration at the camp-fire that night. The idea had taken,

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and the larger boys were off gathering logs for a real blaze.

Larry's mind was full of conflicting emotions. He was having a very painful experience. On all sides boys were congratulating him on his nerve and bravery, while in his heart of hearts he knew he was a coward. While his comrades were proud of him, he was ashamed of himself. His reputation had never been better, but his character had for days been on the verge of destruction. Physically he was a brave, cool-headed, resourceful boy; morally he was afraid to do the right thing. Besides it would be harder now to tell the truth than ever before. Oh, why hadn't he gone on home as he planned to? Oh, well, he had bluffed before and he could bluff through the evening's celebrations, and then to-morrow he would move to the farm and get to work. When he had earned the ten that he needed, he would see then what to do. Perhaps he would seek out the Camp Director privately and tell him the truth, pay back the money, and slip off home. He did not believe

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that he could bear the humiliation of facing the camp after their demonstration in his favor, if they really knew what he had done.

He sought out the Director and told him of his decision to work on the farm a week or two, and asked permission to move his clothes, explaining that he needed the money.

"You look bad, Larry," said Mr. Thorn in a tone of real concern. "I think you ought to get a rest first. You're excited yet, and it's just beginning to tell on you. I'm proud of you, boy, and happy that, because of your quick wits, a tragedy was averted to-day. Better rest a bit before night."

Larry bit his lip, but in spite of himself the tears came, and he turned away more miserable than he could ever remember having been before in his life. Yet it was nothing else save Mr. Thorn's belief in him that turned the tide; the "wee voice" had gained an ally.

After supper the usual ball-game was dispensed with, for the boys chose to stand about in groups discussing the rescue of the afternoon. Never before in the history of the

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camp had the Distinguished Medal been awarded to any camper for the saving of a human life.

Just before the big fire was lighted Donnie asked to see Larry. Larry went to his tent with some misgivings.

"I just wanted to tell you, Larry," blurted out Donnie, "how I appreciated what you did for me to-day." He put out his hand. "Some day I'll pay you back, if I ever get a chance, and somehow I believe I will. I had no business getting out of the boat, but I snagged my line and I thought I could release it. It was a miracle that I wasn't drowned. I would have been if it hadn't been for you."

Larry was very much embarrassed, but managed to mumble something and hurry out. Every one was busy at the fire, so he just slipped behind the boat-house and sat down to think. In fifteen minutes Larry Evans would meet his Waterloo! What was he going to do? "It would be hard to tell the truth, but he'd never have a better chance, and why not," the "wee voice" argued. He sat with his

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head in his hands as he thought it through. He was getting in deeper every minute, that was certain, and if he was ever going to really square himself with the bunch it must be to-night.

He could hear the crackling of the fire and the merry chatter of the crowd. The easy thing would be to run away. The hard thing would be to stand up and take his medicine, no matter what it might be. Likely it would be a dishonorable dismissal.

"We want Larry, we want Larry," came from the fire. He knew his time had come, so he rose to his feet, but without any clear decision as to what he was going to do. The gang welcomed him with a shout. First there was the usual round of yells and songs, and then the "Chief" took the floor.

Briefly he told of the happenings of the day, and then, in an appropriate little speech, advised the campers that Larry Evans was the first boy in the history of the camp to be *entitled* to the special award for life-saving.

Suddenly Larry got to his feet and stum-

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bled rather than walked to the fire. His face was very serious and his lips trembled in spite of himself.

"But I'm not *entitled* to it, fellows," he faltered. "I wish I was, but I'm not, and while I appreciate all you have said, 'Chief,' I cannot accept." A lump came into his throat and his eyes swam in spite of himself. The campers, as well as Mr. Thorn, were too surprised for words.

Larry looked wildly about him, yet he was determined now. He got hold of himself and then went on haltingly:

"By this very fire, only the other night, somebody said, 'A friend is a fellow who knows all about you but likes you just the same.' You fellows haven't known all about me, but I'm going to tell you the truth. You think I'm fine, but I'm not! You're about to give me—a coward—a hero's medal for bravery. I'd like to accept it, but I can't—not until I've squared myself. For three days I've been in torment. I never knew a fellow could be so unhappy. I not only did

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a mean, cowardly thing myself, but I let you fellows blame an innocent boy. To-day that boy was nearly drowned. I am the camper that stole the missing pocketbook. To-day I started home, but was persuaded to come back and work on the farm. I saw an opportunity, by work, to pay back the money that I had spent. You know all the rest. I want to take this opportunity to tell you all how sorry I am that I yielded to the temptation. It looked so easy. Mr. Thorn, here is what is left of it. I'll pay the rest back soon. I'm the guilty boy, and not Donnie Boyle. Instead of being brave, as you all suppose, I've been yellow,"—he said it bitterly,—" but with the help of you fellows I'll rub that yellow streak out to-night."

A profound silence settled on the entire group. A more surprised lot of boys would be difficult to imagine. They could hardly believe their ears. Larry Evans, the camp hero and favorite, a thief; no one else save himself could ever have made them believe any such thing.

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Mr. Thorn was too surprised for speech, yet he felt he must say something. "Larry, this is a great surprise to me, and a disappointment; but I must say, my boy, I admire your pluck in facing the crowd and telling the truth. Unless I'm mistaken, it took more courage to do that than to save Donnie's life. If you have ever really had a yellow streak, I believe you have effectively bleached it out tonight. Under the circumstances we will not insist that you accept the Life Saving Medal, but we are thankful that in the process of saving Donnie's life you have this day saved your own honor, which is dearer than life. And I am certain that I can speak for the camp,—that even after we have found out *all* about you, we are still your friends, Larry, to a man. Fellows, am I right?" A chorus of "Ayes" came from every side. "And while we are at it, wouldn't this be a fine time to clean up a number of other mysteries. Fishing-poles and tennis-rackets and pocket-knives have been missed now and then, all summer. There has never been a satisfactory

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explanation of who broke into the kitchen a week ago, or who put the snake in Fat Williams' bed. Let us make a real clean-up to-night, and every fellow about this fire square himself. Then we can *all* start fresh to-morrow with Larry. What do you say?"

The plan was enthusiastically received and was soon put into practice, each fellow round the circle "fessing up." It turned out to be one of the jolliest nights of the year, and one that many a boy present will never forget. The evening was closed with a real Indian war-dance about the dying embers. Many a boy lay a long time before he went to sleep, just thinking things over, while more than one camper made mighty resolutions. Larry slipped off to sleep quickly, for he was physically and nervously tired—but happy. On the morrow he would join the haying crew, but with a clear conscience and a steady nerve.

III

Larry left the camp reluctantly, and Donnie insisted upon helping him over the hill

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with his belongings. Every day after that Donnie joined the haying crew for a few hours, and in the evenings he spent much time with Larry. Somehow the two seemed suddenly to have discovered each other, and long before the summer was over their chance acquaintance had ripened into a wonderful friendship. Larry discovered that Donnie had had great athletic aspirations, but that a prolonged sickness had made his dreams for himself impossible. Don, on the other hand, discovered that Larry had secret intellectual ambitions, but that they, too, seemed impossible of accomplishment because of home financial conditions.

It was then a pleasant surprise when, a few years later, both boys found themselves in the same freshman class at college. The friendship that had been begun in the good old camp days ripened into a substantial chumship that meant very much to both boys. Larry helped Don with his mathematics and Don helped Larry with his debating, and so it went until they became known about the little

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campus as the "twins," for one was rarely seen without the other.

Then one day a telegram came to Larry. He read it and reread it, unable to believe its message. In the twinkling of an eye his bright and happy present was turned into a gloomy future. Every air-castle that he had built suddenly toppled over as if a violent tornado had struck it. A strange sense of total helplessness suddenly engulfed him. He turned instinctively to Don for support. Donnie read the yellow paper with its sad message:

"Your father died suddenly to-day of heart failure. Your mother succumbed to the shock a few hours later. Come home at once to settle important matters."

In a few weeks Larry was back again, but he was not the same buoyant, bright-faced boy. Plainly he was worried. He and Don took long walks together into the hills. Larry confided that his father had left nothing at all, scarcely enough to pay his debts,

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and the boy found himself high and dry, with nothing with which to finish his college year. The great career that he had planned for himself as an engineer now seemed an impossibility. He had visions of himself teaching school in some out-of-the-way place, or perhaps clerking in a retail store instead of erecting sky-scrapers or spanning great rivers with steel structures, as he had planned. He could go to work, of course he could, but he could not do that and carry his college work; besides, that year would be the last.

The two schemed and devised, but to no avail. Larry absolutely declined the financial assistance proffered him by his chum, for he knew only too well how Don had worked and saved in order that he himself might get an education in the law.

It was finally decided that Larry would at least see the semester out, in hopes that something better might break for him.

At vacation time he went home to make some final adjustments in his father's affairs, and while there a certain letter reached him.

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It was from Don, and read something like this:

"MY DEAR LARRY:

"As you might expect, I have been giving this problem of yours a good deal of thought since I left you at the station. Somehow I seem to have been able to view it all more accurately since being here alone. I've come to the following conclusion, which will no doubt surprise you, but that, nevertheless, is the result of much clear thinking.

"There is no doubt but that, by natural endowment, you are the larger-calibered man of the two of us, and because of this fact you will be able to get vastly more out of a college course than I would. In time I would make a mediocre lawyer,—there are too many of them now. In time you will make a truly great engineer. Our country is young yet; she has many great development and reclamation projects ahead of her. She needs men with bodies and intellects like yours. Therefore, if we cannot both have a college education, it is poor economy, so far as society is concerned, to educate me and submerge you in a rural schoolhouse.

"Accordingly, herewith find attached a check, which is the balance of my unspent college money. By rigid economy on your part, and by adding to it through your vacation

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periods, you will find it possible to accomplish your heart's desire. I know what you will say, old man, but I have thought that all out, too. I am absolutely satisfied that it is not only the fair but the wise thing to do. But for you I would never have had the first year in college. I am glad to be alive, and able to serve you in this little way. Do not worry about me for a day. I will work out my salvation in some other direction, and will keep track of you. If you make good, as I feel certain that you will, I will make myself known to you sometime in the future years, especially if I need help.

"By the time this letter reaches you I will be gone far away into an isolated corner of the earth, but I shall be happy in you and shall count your success mine. From to-day on, you live two lives,—one for you and one for me; from now on, you must be both 'twins,' and let it be a secret only between us. I count myself rich in having known you, and as you gave me back *life*, I now give you back *hope*. Good luck to you in your quest of usefulness and success. In memory of the old camp days, I am *yours*

"DONNIE."

Larry took down his old hat from the peg and slipped out to walk for hours and hours in the great silent hills. When he came back,

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his face was shining. He had determined to live for the "twins." As if by magic his toppled air-castles again arranged themselves, and Larry Evans went back to college with a vengeance, determined to be worthy of such a friend.

Some years later a stalwart lad knocked at the door of the private office of Mr. L. R. Evans, consulting engineer. He was politely shown in to the great man's desk, cluttered as it was with rolls of blue-prints and heaps of sketches.

"My name, sir, is Don Boyle, Junior, and I have brought a message from my father to you. He is in great need of you, and sent me to bring you. He has been ill for months, and has important business that only you can transact."

"Donnie Boyle, on my soul!" exclaimed Larry. "Go to him—yes, to the North Pole. Come, where is he?"

In a few hours Larry Evans sat by the bedside of Donnie Boyle, checking carefully with

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the feeble man a set of blue-prints concerning a reclamation scheme that was destined to water a million acres of desert land and cause it to blossom like a rose. So it came about that the brain-child of an almost unknown homesteader of the great Southwest brought prosperity to a great people.

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TRAPPED ON TOPAZ MOUNTAIN

Story Two

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TRAPPED ON TOPAZ MOUNTAIN

Story Two

THE "Chief" took his place quietly by the fire and waited for the usual chatter, after the songs and announcements, to quiet down. Then he began:

"Some of you didn't know that we had a real, sure-enough cowboy along this year as a tent-leader. I have no doubt he has had many a hair-raising escape from wolves, mountain lions, Indians, and possibly buffalo. I've asked the Leader of 'Noisy One' to tell us a real Western story to-night, and I believe he will. If any of you fellows get the shivers too severely, just come up closer and sit by the fire. Now we're ready, Mr. Cowboy, for your yarn."

The Leader of Tent One, having decided to

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tell his story just where he was, raised his voice so he could be heard around the circle, and began:

"Boys, I want to take you all up into the sheep-country with me to-night,—to the great old sheep-ranch where I spent most of my kid days; where we camped all the year round, even to having the stories by the fire at night in front of the bunk-house, before we turned in. I'm going to tell you how an old pal of mine, Monte Sherwood, was once trapped on Topaz Mountain during one of the numerous sheep and cattle wars that were more or less common on the open range not so many years ago."

Monte stood at the door of the little ranch-house irresolute. His eyes scanned the distant, broken table-lands again and again, just as if he could see the countless sheep that he knew were grazing somewhere on those grey-green mesas. Just beyond lay Topaz Mountain, with here and there a yellow blotch upon its otherwise barren side, to indicate where

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some hopeful prospector had, a few years before, sunk his shaft in an effort to relocate the "Tenderfoot" vein that had mysteriously pinched out in the old Lucky Strike Mine.

To the north of the Sherwood ranch lay Cottenwood. It would do violence to the truth to call it a village, yet it was the nearest post-office, and was the last link between the endless Rockies and the wonderful civilization that lay somewhere out beyond. Monte had gone, of course, for the mail and the news,—and what news it had been that day! He had ridden home post-haste to carry the word to his father, but, of course, as luck would have it, he found him absent and his mother with him; gone to a neighbor's, no doubt, on business.

Bucephalus stood with his bridle-reins hanging. He seemed to sense that there was something unusual in the air, for twice he lifted his beautiful, intelligent head and softly whinnied, as much as to say, "Tell me, Monte, is it serious?" However, Monte was too deeply lost in thought just at that moment to

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even be conscious of the presence of his favorite horse. He was turning over in his mind a dozen possible things to do, and striving, by hurriedly weighing the probable consequence of each one, to arrive at the safest under the circumstances.

"If Dad were only here," he said twice, and each time with more conviction. "I cannot possibly reach both flocks before dark, and as sure as I go to Raven Gulch it will develop that I ought to have gone to Spruce Meadow." Then, turning to Bucephalus, he addressed him: "Old fellow, how's your pep? Can you do a good twenty yet before dark? I know you have done a good day's work already, old hoss, but say, what if a bunch of those cowmen *should* stampede that fine herd of Herdwicks over the rim-rock and us sitting here enjoying a spring sunset. Say, are you good for it? Of course you are—you have never failed me yet. Yes, sir, we'll just leave a bit of a note for the folks and grab a bite and we'll be off."

He dashed into the house, rummaged about

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for a paper and pencil, and then hastily scrawled the following:

"Sorry you weren't here. Great excitement at Cottenwood. Gang of cowmen attacked Jerry Darsey's flocks at Beaver Bend last night. Both herders fatally shot and hundreds of sheep stampeded into the canyon. Poster at Kern's Crossing says every head of sheep in the country is to be destroyed.

"Have started for Spruce Meadow and have taken half the extra ammunition and the extra gun. Will try to reach Raven Gulch before dark. If you come by six, better start for Raven Gulch at once.

"Hastily,
"MONTE."

The strapping big lad hurried out of the little ranch, swung into the saddle of his waiting horse, and was off at a sharp gallop over the brown prairie. In an hour they were at the Lennox ranch, but found no one there save the Chinese cook.

"Where's everybody, Lee?" Monte demanded as he pulled in his panting mount.

"Him alle gone," said the blond-faced

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heathen. "Rid away like clazy fellas—want me go too, but Lee no go—No likee sheep—Too much ting-a-ling—ba-ba."

"Like as not this gang of marauding cow-punchers will get you too, Mr. Lee," said Monte seriously. "Cut your pigtail off and make you dance a Chinese jig. Anyway, Lee, listen; don't tell a soul I was here unless it should be my father. Understand? Going to be great excitement before morning. Are you armed, that is, have you anything for self-protection?"

"Yes, yes, me armed and legged too," grinned the Chinaman. "No cowboy catchee Lee. Him run like-a like-a—a gleese lightning."

"All right, Lee. Good luck. Remember, you haven't seen *me;* only if any of the Lennox men show up, tell them the cowboys expect to rid Galitin County of sheep to-night. If they have any men to spare, send them on over to Raven Gulch."

He was gone in a cloud of dust. In less than two hours the purple haze of the foot-

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hills would change to darkness, while somewhere out yonder in that never-ending stretch of mesas, gulches, and abrupt table-rocks, grazed the Sherwood sheep, more than ten thousand head of them, the best stock on the reserve and representing the earthly possessions of the Sherwoods.

"Beats the Dutch," thought Monte as he galloped over the sun-baked hills, "how there isn't even room out here in this vast wilderness for a few hundred men to get on together without quarreling. Isn't there room in the Rocky Mountains for both sheep and cattle—and men—to feed and roam? Why, you could hide ten million head of sheep on the Front Range and then they would be so scattered you couldn't find them, and they talking about a few thousand head entirely destroying the pasture. It's all bluff—plain bluff, that's all. Anyway, the sheep men were here first. They ought to have right-of-way on range. Got to have cattle, of course, but let 'em run them somewhere else. Supposing the cattle won't feed where the sheep have

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been, sheep can thrive where cattle would starve. What's more, we've got to have wool as well as beefsteak, and I'm not going to be bluffed."

Bucephalus was doing his very best. At Little Beaver they stopped to drink and to blow. At the Forks they came suddenly upon four strange horsemen who were escorting a half-dozen heavily laden pack-mules. Every man was heavily armed and wore several weeks of dirty beard on his face.

"A hard-looking lot," was Monte's mental observation. Bucephalus didn't like their looks either, for he suddenly shied, kicked up his heels, and dashed on up the trail. The strangers shouted something after him, but he missed it. "Advance guard," thought Monte; " the rest are out skirmishing."

It was a half-hour before dark when the horse and rider suddenly emerged through the granite gap and started down the trail for the Sherwood corrals in the meadow. Migeal met Monte, and could not suppress his excitement at having the boy dash so unexpectedly

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into camp. As quietly as he could, Monte told the Mexican of the situation, urging him to lose no time in getting his sheep into the corral. He left him the extra gun and half of his ammunition, and then prepared to ride on to Raven Gulch, which lay on the other side of Topaz Mountain and a good hour's ride away.

The Mexican pleaded with the boy to stay with him; for while he was by no means a coward about caring for the sheep, he had a mortal dread of cowmen. Strange stories had filtered into the Colorado sheep country from Utah and New Mexico about the mysterious disappearance of certain herders. In certain sections the sheep-and-cattle feud had been very bitter, and Migeal was positive that if the cowmen were coming, this was his last night on earth. Monte reassured him as best he could, finally promising that, if he found his father at Raven Gulch Camp, he would at once return to the meadows and stay with the Mexican until the scare was over. If all went well, he would be back, in fact, by ten

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o'clock. They agreed upon signals; then the Mexican dashed off to care for his sheep, while Monte climbed into the saddle and set out over the old gold trail that crosses Topaz to the west.

The shadows were lengthening. Already it was twilight in the canyon. In thirty minutes it would be dark, yet the boy felt no fear. Bucephalus was as sure-footed as a goat, and knew every step of the winding trail. Monte simply gave him the reins and urged him on. The wilderness was almost oppressive because of the silence; not even a breeze stirred in the responsive aspens. Monte fell to thinking of the strange party that he had passed on the hog's-back, and got to speculating as to where they were headed for and what their purpose might be. Of course they might have been prospectors, but more than likely they were not, for even the golden treasure of Topaz Mountain was now only a story. Now they were cowmen—adventurers.

He was well on to the upper flank of Topaz when suddenly he heard voices. Then he saw

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a fire through the pines. He quickly pulled off the trail and listened. There were at least a dozen men sitting about the fire, laughing and joking, as they ate their evening meal.

Suddenly Monte was possessed with a burning desire to know *what* they were talking about. So, suiting the action to the thought, he led Bucephalus well back into a dense thicket of aspen, untied the long lariat rope from the saddle, and securely fastened the animal, he thought, so it might feed while he should stalk the camp and see what the party proposed to do. Noiselessly he crept nearer and nearer. Apparently they were not in the least concerned lest they be discovered, for they laughed uproariously and bantered each other. Suddenly Monte paused, even to holding his breath. Yes, there could be no mistaking it; they were talking about Herdwicks, and there were no other Herdwicks in the country save the prize flock of Martin Sherwood, but because of the breeze and the lilt of the rushing stream, Monte could not make head or tail of the conversa-

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tion. He must get a little closer. Every nerve and muscle in his lithe young body were tingling. His every sense was alert and strained. Nearer and nearer he drew, and yet the babbling stream made it impossible for him to catch a completed sentence.

At any rate, he was satisfied they were the marauding cowmen, and that they were planning their attack on his father's sheep at that very moment. He was so eager to gain definite information, yet it suddenly dawned upon him that it was of even more importance to get word of their presence to the herders in the meadow camp. Accordingly he quietly withdrew, but because two of the men had left the fire for more wood, he was compelled to detour in order to avoid them. He was in an old grove of dead aspen now. The ground was fairly strewn with fallen poles, and twice he stumbled over them with a crash. How he thanked his lucky stars for that lilting, noisy brook that so kindly drowned his own noises.

He was nearly out to the clear when suddenly a figure rose before him, and, in a voice

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of no uncertainty, ordered him, with an oath, to throw up his hands. He reached quickly for his gun, but a second figure suddenly appeared and covered him like a flash. In an instant he was disarmed and quietly marched back to the fire.

"Ho, ho, a spy," laughed the leader, rapping Monte unceremoniously on the head with the butt end of his leather quirt. "A spy,—yet he's nothing but a boy. Must be powerfully short-handed, these sheep fellows. Say, lad, where is this herd of prize Herdwicks, anyway? We want to take a look at them before morning."

Monte eyed the swarthy cowman, but made no reply.

"Won't tell, eh?" sneered the cowman. "Well, we'll see. What do you say, men? Shall we brand this yearling?"

Cries of "Sure," "You bet," "Let 'er go," was the response.

"As you say," said the tormentor. "Get a good hot stick there, you, Dave, while we strip him."

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Beads of perspiration stood out on Monte's forehead, yet his eye was clear and his face determined. They could kill him if they chose, but not a word would they get about the Herdwicks.

The hot brand was taken from the fire, and Monte's shirt was pulled from his trousers, baring his back. They cheered enthusiastically. Should he die fighting, or —— No, suddenly he had an inspiration. He would misdirect them, and perhaps then he might get away. He would send them in the opposite direction of Raven Gulch and perhaps he might save the Herdwicks at least.

"Give me a chance to talk," he managed to say.

"Good," said the leader, throwing down his charred bit of wood. "Now talk, plain and to the point. *If you tell the truth,* we'll turn you loose in the morning; but if you lie, you're likely to feed the buzzards, like Old Sandy Smyth did over on the Sweet Water. Mind now, no monkey business. Where is that flock of Herdwicks? How far is it to

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them, and what sort of protection has the flock?"

"Can't give you exact information as to where they are," answered Monte without a quiver.

"Oh, let's not monkey with the kid," spoke up one of the cowmen. "He won't tell you anything. I can tell by looking at him. Let's make him safe, so he can't spread the alarm, and let's get at our business. We know where the sheep are, and that there's no one there but a Mexican herder. Come, let's go."

"And do what with the kid?" objected a half-dozen others.

"Well—let's see. Why, the best thing is to chuck him into one of these old prospect-holes. Give him a bit of grub, and if he does have to stay a week, like as not some one will rescue him."

"It's a go," said the man who was apparently the leader. "Here, tie his hands, take his gun and that extra ammunition, and we'll fix him in a little while."

Monte's heart felt like a lump of lead in his

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breast. He had failed, after all, by pure carelessness. In that moment he would as soon have had them shoot him on the spot as anything he could think of.

Quickly they led him to the hillside that was fairly pitted with old prospect-holes, and, selecting one from which escape, without help, would be utterly impossible, they put a lariat rope about his shoulders and lowered him to the bottom, instructing him to untie the rope. This he did at the point of a six-shooter. In a few moments all was quiet on Topaz Mountain, for the cowmen, having finished their evening meal and effectively disposed of their intruder, were ready to proceed to business.

The stars were out now and twinkled brightly overhead. Soon the moon would be up and it would not be so lonesome at least. Three times during the first hour Monte tried to scale the granite walls about him. Once he succeeded in climbing up a distance of more than twelve feet, only to slip and fall to the bottom. Fearing that he might break an arm or leg and become unconscious in the pit,

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he decided to wait patiently for help. The folks at home would soon learn of his disappearance and begin a search. True, there were hundreds of such holes all over the mountain, and they might miss him. He would rest quietly until daylight and save his strength.

There were several bits of wood in the old shaft, including a medium-dead spruce that probably the wind had tumbled in. He set to work reducing this material to kindling, so that he might build a fire in the morning with the chance that the smoke might attract help. At last, his little task completed, he sat calmly thinking.

He was wondering if the gang had attacked either of the sheep-camps yet. He had visions of his father's herd of Herdwicks plunging over the edge of the steep rim-rock to the west of the meadow. He wondered if old Sport, the faithful collie, had been shot. Probably the sheep-herders had been disposed of, too, or perhaps dumped into some other such prison as his own.

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How he reproached himself for getting trapped like a beast in a pitfall. How he regretted that he had not given the cowmen a wide berth and hurried on to his father's corrals. He was pacing about the old shaft now restlessly. It was difficult for him, fairly seething with life and energy, to sit still and wait. Wasn't there something he could do? Perhaps, after all, he could dig out some narrow steps in the softer stratas and work his way out. He liked the idea. It was far better than sitting still and helpless all the night. He always carried a very large pocket-knife; it came in so handy about the ranch. After carefully examining the walls of the shaft all around, he chose the most likely spot and began to dig. He was surprised how soft he found the pockets of feldspar that occurred at regular intervals in the granite wall. He became engrossed in his task and already had visions of escape. As he dug away he began to plan just what was best to do if he *did* reach the top. He would get Bucephalus and —— It was the first thought he had

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given the horse since he had tied him several hours before. Probably the cowmen had located the animal and taken him along. There wasn't one chance in a hundred that the horse was still there. No, he must go afoot. He dug on and on. By standing in one niche and holding on to a second with his left hand, he was able, by working on a spiral, to cut a third handhold above him; then, moving up a step, would start another one, and so on. His arm was nearly paralyzed. Twice he thought he could not stand it another moment. The dust and chips settled into his face, and his eyes burned, but he was unable to rub them without falling to the bottom again.

Suddenly he heard footsteps above in the brush. He listened intently. What could it be? Visions of mountain lions and timber wolves flashed into his mind; yet from such he knew he was safe. Perhaps a cowman had returned to see if he was still imprisoned. Yet it did not sound like a human step; it was too heavy and deliberate. Then an inspiration flashed into his mind—perhaps it was Bu-

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cephalus. Hardly likely, but possible. In that event, if he failed to be able to climb out, he must try to keep the horse near, by talking to him. His rescuers would be able to locate him quickly by the horse.

Taking a firm grip of his last notch and straining his head so as to see the opening at the top, he gently called the horse, as he always did in the pasture. A faint whinny was his only reward. Yet he was encouraged. He set to cutting another notch,—he was within ten feet of the surface at that very instant. As the sound of the horse would fade away, he would stop his work and call again and again until he could hear the animal once more. Each time Bucephalus would return to the vicinity of the hole and blow softly through his nose. Twice he pawed the ground restlessly. Evidently he recognized the voice but was at a complete loss to locate it. Monte knew him to be extremely shy of prospect-holes, and so was not surprised that he could not get the horse near enough to see him.

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He worked like a man possessed, inspired by the possibility of yet getting free in time to be of some help at the corral. He always carried an extra gun in his saddle-bags, and so would be ready for action if —— He was ready to cut another notch now, but, to his sorrow, discovered there were no more pockets of feldspar above him, at least that he could reach. Above him rose seven or eight feet of solid granite.

Fortunately the pole of the dead young spruce he had stripped had proved too large for kindling. If he but had it, he might rig a scaffold from his notch to a near-by ledge and prospect from there, but how to get that pole up there was a puzzle. Yet he was not to be defeated if there was any way out. Carefully descending to the bottom, he removed his leather jacket and cut it into strips which he tied together into an improvised rope. Next he securely fastened the end of this rope to the tip of the pole, and standing it, butt downward, against the wall, he took the other end of the leather in his teeth and

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began to climb again by his notches. When at the top, he began, by means of his free hand and teeth, to pull the light, tough pole upward. In spite of the difficulties, everything went well. At last the pole was in his hand, and, by carefully working it up the wall ahead of him, he was able to slip the tip end around to the opposite wall of the shaft. He carefully settled the butt into his last notch in the wall, and then, with one foot, began to wedge the pole crosswise. He had no idea what good the wedge would do him, save that there might be opportunity to cut more notches on the far side. He would try it anyway. If the pole broke under his weight,—well, it was only twenty feet to the bottom, and he would take a chance.

Slowly he ventured out onto the springing pole. In an instant three feet or more of the small end snapped off, and but for his agility with his hands, he would have crashed to the bottom. How thankful he was that he had practiced on the old cross-bar at the corral-gate at home. The pole was securely wedged

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now, and was stout enough to carry his weight. Slowly he hand-over-handed his way to the opposite wall of the shaft and then raised himself to the pole. There were no feldspar pockets within reach. He was in no better shape than he had been an hour ago; furthermore he ached in every joint.

He now turned his entire attention to the horse above. If it was Bucephalus, and he was confident that it must be, perhaps he could tease him to the hole for company. Then another bright idea flashed into his mind. He had tethered Bucephalus with his best lariat. If he could but get the horse near enough, such a thing might be possible as the rope dangling into his prison. It was at least a fighting chance. He perched himself as comfortably as possible on the pole and began pleading with the horse. A friendly whinny was the only result for more than half an hour, and then the horse, unable to resist his master's pleading, moved nearer and nearer that treacherous pit until Monte could see his head. Yes, it was " Old Buceph," all

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right,—and trailing the lariat rope. The horse looked curiously down at the boy. The boy looked longingly up at the rope not more than four feet above his head as he stood on the old spruce prop.

"Dying of thirst ten feet from a spring has nothing on this," said Monte. Addressing the horse: "Bucephalus, if you were a dog instead of a horse, you'd have sense enough to go for help. Anyway, you have been faithful to me all night, and that's something. We'll hunt cowboys together yet."

Monte's eye just then fell on the tip end of the spruce pole as it lay at the bottom of his moonlit prison. "I might," he said with a laugh. "It's worth a try. By the Great Horned Spoon, we'll fool 'em yet." Like a huge cat he worked his way across the pole and then down the hand-dug notches, fastened the bit of spruce tip to his neck with his handkerchief, and then back again. Bucephalus was a bit suspicious but stood patiently by, blowing the while through his great distended nostrils.

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Slowly Monte raised his stick so as not to frighten the horse, talking to him in his most persuasive tones. Gently he reached the stick through the loose rope and carefully worked it toward him. Twice Bucephalus reared back and took the rope with him, but Monte was determined, and, with marvelous patience and skill, he began all over again. He must guard against the time when the rope should fall into the pit, for if the horse should become frightened he probably would not return. Inch by inch the double loop came nearer to the imprisoned boy, until at last he excitedly grasped the strand of rope and worked it toward him. When the end was in his hand, he passed it quickly about his body, just under his arms, and adjusted a safe knot, so that, no matter how hard Bucephalus might pull, it would be impossible to become crushed in a noose. Then, winding his hand securely in the rope, as high up as he could reach, he prepared to remove his weight from the pole perch to the rope. Then, thinking better of his plan, he decided to frighten Bucephalus

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backward a few paces first, for fear his unexpected weight might cause the horse to slip into the pit on top of him. Bucephalus seemed to understand the situation and stood patiently waiting orders, his great ears forward and his big eyes intent on Monte's every move.

"Back — old fellow — back. That's it. Steady now, steady—steady." Monte swung clear of the pole as the rope tightened. Suddenly there was a snort, a sudden jerk, and Monte's head was just above the surface of the prospect hole.

"Steady, boy, steady," he called. "Back —back, Buceph, back ——" In ten seconds Monte Sherwood stood on terra firma again, with his arms affectionately about a wildly excited horse.

In less than an hour Monte dashed into the peaceful sheep-camp at Raven Gulch and found his father and six men from Lennox's on guard at the corral. The cattlemen had found them on guard, and so had withdrawn into the night, and, although now it was al-

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most morning, nothing more had been heard of them.

"Come, then," said Monte. "Half of us must circuit Topaz and get back to the meadows. Migeal will need help. We'll save the sheep yet, and I'm telling you all now that Bucephalus gets a silver bridle and a bran-mash every winter night. Explanations later. Let's move."

And so it came about that a new sheep-and-cattle war was narrowly averted in the Cottenwood district.

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THE ROBBERS OF COREY SWAMP

Story Three

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THE ROBBERS OF COREY SWAMP

Story Three

"*WE want a story,*" shouted Shortie above the hubbub. "We want a *big* story."

"*So do we,*" shouted back a happy trio on the other side of the fire.

"*We want a whole flock of 'em,*" caroled another energetic group.

"Yes, no doubt," laughed the camp "Chief," as he held up both hands for quiet; "but let's have them one at a time. What do you say, Tent Two's to entertain us tonight, and its bashful leader says he is going to tell us about the Robbers of Corey Swamp. Sounds interesting! All of you better hold on to your Ingersolls and put your diamonds and other precious stones in your mouth until he is through. Now, we're all ready for you, Mr. Story-Teller, and your yarn. I always did like robbers and swamps anyway."

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The Story-Teller rose in his place, and, after quiet had settled on the group, deliberately poked up the fire more to his liking, threw on a choice old pine-knot that he had dragged in from the hillside, and, when he was assured that it was going to burn, he stepped back and began:

Tater Briggs leaned heavily against the front-porch post and gazed upward into the maze of gently moving oak-leaves in the great old tree that shaded the little farmhouse. Every muscle in his stalwart body ached, and his head was a bit dizzy in spite of himself. From sun-up till late evening in a field of fresh-cut clover is enough to tire even a body of steel. Tater was equal to any one man in the neighborhood when it came to putting up hay, and if there had been nothing else to tire him save one long day after another of manual labor, he would not have minded it; but with every day and night, too, full of worry, worry, he felt that the situation was fast getting the better of him. Several times that

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day he had suddenly shaken himself, as if to get free from some unwelcome load that clung tenaciously to his weary shoulders. He tried to whistle, but the tune was a monotonous farce. He laughed twice, not his natural laugh, but a cold, lifeless sound that had not a little mockery in it. The boy could never remember being beaten, and it hurt him terribly now, to sit and calmly look cold defeat in the face. He had been in a tight fix ever so many times before, but had always found a way out. This time there seemed no avenue of escape.

He had carefully computed the hay-yield that day, and even at top market-price,—if, indeed, he should be fortunate enough to get that,—it would still leave him more than one hundred dollars short on the mortgage. He pulled out a dirty letter from his overalls pocket and read it for the tenth time. "Under ordinary circumstances would be glad to extend payment," it ran, "but, being unusually hard pressed for cash this season, must expect you to redeem the note on date. It

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has been a good season and you have had a good crop." "Yes," growled Tater between clenched teeth, "but you forget altogether that a boy—even a big, strong, willing one,—can't produce the crop that a boy and a man can." He closed his eyes wearily, and then, in his mind's eye, he saw them again carefully bearing his father's prostrate body through the orchard gate. He saw them lay the old gentleman carefully on the bed. He could hear him groan yet, and see the great beads of perspiration stand out on his forehead, as the surgeon carefully set the shattered limb and bound the makeshift splints into place with long strips from an old sheet. "Unusually hard pressed for cash," breathed Tater in contempt, "with a limousine and two touring-cars, a summer home, and a whole flock of servants. Suppose Dad's doctor's bill would be small change to you,"—addressing the absent landowner,—"but to me, computed in cords of wood and tons of hay on top of the mortgage, it's a load. If I could find an oil-well, or corner hogs now and then like you do,

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I'd be all right; but no such luck. Luck! I'd like to meet that fellow, just to see what he looks like. Mother says there is no such thing as luck, that it is Divine Providence, but I have my doubts ——"

"Hi there, Tater," said a cheery voice from the orchard path. "You look like a whole string of storm-clouds. What's the matter? Mighty strange to see you so glum. Off your feed, or lost your best friend, or just had bad luck? Come, cheer up a bit. Trouble is largely imaginary, anyhow. What you need is to lay off a bit and have some fun. Why, to see you work, you'd think the hull of civilization depended on the clover hay you could raise on that sixty."

Ben Stokes was an optimist,—worked some, but not much, but was always happy. Didn't own a stick save what was on his back, —overalls and a straw hat,—but always claimed he was rich; had the "hull plumb out-of-doors, three lakes full of fish, big woods full of nuts, and a big heart full of cheer."

Tater looked up at him and smiled in spite

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of himself. "Easy to talk, Ben," he said, "and I'm ashamed of myself for being glum, but sometimes I just can't help it. Some folks seem to have so much more than their share, and some of the rest of us, by working day and night, can't make ends meet. Don't seem like things are very well divided."

"Oh, I know what's bothering you, kid," said Ben confidentially. "It gets on your nerves, same as mine, to see that bunch of city swells round in the Cove, putting on all their style and feathers, while us poor duffers have to work day in and day out. Gets us sort of riled, too, sometimes; but shucks, Tater, they have their bad luck, too. Whoever heard of such an outlandish thing as wearing a thousand dollars' worth of diamonds in bathing! Whoopee, man, but I bet some female bass is sporting that necklace around the deep, cool bottom of Little Corey Lake this very instant."

"Lost diamonds—no—who?" inquired Tater, forgetting his frown. "Lost them in bathing?"

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"Yes, Ethel Stonebridge, yesterday. Seems it was her mother's wedding-gift or something. She was in a hurry to get into the water and forgot to take them off. When she came out they were gone. Offering two hundred dollars reward for 'em, but, shucks, might as well offer a million. They're gone. Imagine finding a little slender necklace in that lake. So, boy, you see we all have a streak of luck sometimes."

"But they might not be in the water at all," said Tater, a sudden inspiration in his face. "She might have dropped them in the sand. You say they are offering two hundred dollars ——"

"Yes, but every man, woman, and child in the Cove is looking for them. They'll have all the sand in Little Corey Lake through a sieve before morning. Jim and the bunch are all over there, diving for them. Why, a needle in a haystack is in plain sight compared to that necklace. It's gone, old boy, forever. A thousand dollars' worth of useless luxury, but, shucks, they won't ever miss it. It is

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just the same as if old Stonebridge had dropped a copper into a crock."

Tater was doubtful. "I've heard," he ventured cautiously, "that the old man is unusually hard pressed for cash just now." Then suddenly Tater's frown returned. "Suppose the old fellow will be more unreasonable than ordinary under those circumstances." The meaning of the last remark, however, was completely lost on Ben.

"Say, Tater, I most forgot what I came over here to say. Them diamonds have got everybody 'kerflumixed.' The big bulls are out in the marsh. Last night they croaked like a circus-band. One fellow over there plays bass, Tater, and, without any exaggeration, he goes plumb down to low *k* or *m*. Croak! why, man, that frog must be a humdinger. I expect his legs, laying snugly in a frying-pan, would make a spring turkey blush with shame. What you say? Are you on? Let's go frog-hunting. The moon's right and the marsh is simply running over with them. Besides, a little evening's joy

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would do you good. If you don't stop and play a little, you are going to get old before your time."

Tater thought just a moment. His chores were done up, and his father was asleep and apparently comfortable. The boy was weary and sore, yet the idea struck him, for he hadn't had time to fish or swim with the bunch all summer. Perhaps it would do him good, and help him forget, for a few hours at least, the financial worries that burdened his soul.

"I've got my lantern down in your boat and a couple of bags. I'll row and you can do the catchin'," said Ben by way of argument. "When we're through, you can drop me off at the landing and we'll all eat frog-legs to-morrow. What do you say?"

"I'll go," said Tater; and before he knew it, he was whistling cheerfully as he made his way down the green cool path toward the little boat-landing by the willows.

It was one of those matchless late spring nights, with a full yellow moon glimmering across the water. Out on the big lake were

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music and dancing lights. In the little lake quiet reigned, save for the occasional hoarse croak of a monstrous frog,—no doubt tuning up for the concert that would begin ere long, —and the usual joyous chorus of little "peepers," who sang with perfect abandon their shrill, monotonous song. Across the lake Tater could still see the black outline of the great cat-tail swamp that lay just beyond.

He had grown up with that swamp. Times without number he had fished along the edges for bullheads. More than once a wary bass had taken him far in among the floating green clumps. How many late autumn days had he lain in the frost-killed cat-tails and shot ducks and geese as they crossed to the inlet. Many were the nights, happy recollections every one of them, that he had hunted the elusive bullfrog with spear and snatch-hook and a bit of red flannel, in company with his best pals. To him the lake, with its swamp banks, was an open book; he knew its secrets and enjoyed them.

They were climbing into the boat now, and

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soon two boys were headed toward the land of blackbirds, cat-tails, and water-snakes. They glided on in silence for some moments, each occupied with his own thoughts.

"The fellow that finds those diamonds," said Tater at length, "will be in luck. I'd rather find them than anything I can think of just now. That reward would save me a lot of grief at present."

"They don't interest me," laughed back Ben. "I'd rather have a good catch of frogs, for even if I do lose a few of *them*, it isn't a killing affair. Just think of that whole village over there upset about a few diamonds! Why, look, Tater, we have diamonds of our own. See, yonder is the first star,—and they are fastened on, too, so they can't get lost. Miss Night is some lady when she gets on all her jewelry, isn't she?"

"Ethel Stonebridge is a fine young lady, Ben, too," said Tater thoughtfully. "I contracted to haul her wood for the winter. She came all the way out here to see if I'd do it for her,—said the maple from the Sand Point

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made the best fuel for her fireplaces. I've heard she does a heap of good with her father's money, too. Mighty sorry about her loss."

"Seems to me you bought that sixty you've been haying from old Stonebridge, didn't you?" questioned Ben adroitly.

"Yes," replied Tater, "but it isn't paid for, and that's what's bothering me," confided the boy. "You see, Dad's doctor's bill was very heavy, and ——"

"Why, the old codger wouldn't crowd you, surely, when he knows about your Dad, would he?" questioned Ben indignantly.

"Says he couldn't grant me an extension," replied Tater.

"I'm glad they lost those diamonds," snorted Ben. "Good enough for 'em. Wouldn't grant you an extension? Why, I hope their house gets burned down and their limousine gets smashed, and ——"

"Whoa-a-a there," laughed Tater. "You don't wish any such thing. Business is business and mortgages are mortgages. I

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wouldn't care so much about myself, but it will crush Dad. I've thought of borrowing the money, but, you see, I've no security to give but me —— Oh, well, you know, business is business."

"Hear that," whispered Ben. "Talk about your bass viol. Easy now, old fellow. Get ready for business. He's right in yonder. You know, Tater, those old fellows are ventriloquists. They always sound like where they ain't. You want to make up your mind for a certainty where he is,—and then go in the opposite direction."

The boat was skirting the cat-tails now and making its way through the great mats of pond-lilies that stretched in every direction. Tater lay stretched at full length in the bow of the boat. In one hand he held the spotlight with which he searched the endless sea of green. The other arm was ready to catch any huge monster that might be located.

"Easy now, easy," he whispered to Ben. "Straight ahead now—gently." The big bullfrog croaked a rasping challenge.

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"Some love-song, that," snickered Ben in great glee. "You'll scare all the lady frogs away, Greenie. I'll bet he's a Tartar, Tater. Thinks he owns the marsh ——"

"Sh-h-h-h," cautioned Tater. "There he sits. See him?" He directed the long white ray of the spot-light full upon the great frog, whereupon he suddenly puffed himself up to twice his natural size, until his silver-white throat looked as if it would burst, and then came the croak again. Both boys jumped in spite of themselves. Such a frog they never had seen before. Slowly the boat with the ever watchful boys was pushed forward. Eagerly Tater trained his light on the monster and got ready for the grab.

"Beats hunting diamonds," breathed Ben, unable to contain his excitement; "and you can't eat 'em ——"

"Sh-h-h-h," again cautioned Tater.

"This is our lucky night," whispered Ben, his eyes glued on the huge frog blinking blindly into the night.

They were within six feet now and getting

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closer every minute. Twice the creature moved a bit, and both boys held their breath. Nearer, nearer ——

"Great Jehoshaphat!" groaned Ben. "That's her, all right—I mean him. He's the boy. Talk about frogs, why ——"

"Sh-h-h-h," cautioned Tater again. "Tend to your knitting. That's it—right a little. Easy now—there—there—steady—steady, now." He was at last within reaching-distance. The big frog was motionless, paralyzed by the light. Tater made a quick grab. There was a hoarse croak.

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"Got him!" cried Tater.

"Hurrah!" cried Ben—and then there was a quick splash.

Tater mumbled something about luck, but Ben was too surprised to speak at first. Both boys just sat and looked at each other.

"Must have had greasy fingers," muttered Ben at last. "Why, boy, that was the king of frogs. That was the Kaiser, boy, and you let him go. There—hear that? All the frogs in Corey Swamp are laughing at you.

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Speaking of luck! Oh, yes—well, what next?"

"We'll try for another," said Tater. "I was certain I had the old boy, but I missed aim. Just had hold of the end of his hind leg. I'm awfully sorry. You let me row. I'm really too frazzled out to catch frogs."

After changing places in the boat, they rowed on in silence. Now and then a big bull would call, but his exact location could not be ascertained. For an hour they plowed through the swamp, catching but two other frogs. Finally Tater made up his mind he must go in. Ben was disgusted and willing, so Tater turned the boat about and soon had the little craft alongside Ben's landing.

"Better let me have the light," said Tater. "You take the two frogs. Divided they are useless, and I may pick up a couple on the way home. They seem to be holding their concert on the other side of the lake to-night."

Ben agreed, and soon Tater was on his way home. Alone on the quiet cool water, his mind quickly ran back to his trouble. List-

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lessly he let the oars hang, while he turned the whole matter over for the tenth time that day. Silently his little boat drifted toward the marshy outlet.

"If I could only deal through Miss Ethel," he was saying, "I believe she would help me. Think I'll take over the first load of wood to-morrow and see if she is about."

The nose of the boat bumped into a sand-bar with a sudden jar. He rose to pole the boat off, when a strange sound attracted his attention. Instantly he recognized it. It was the call of the male bittern, which told him with a certainty that a nest was in the immediate neighborhood. "Perhaps there are young in it," thought Tater, who was tremendously interested in all bird-life, especially water-birds. Only twice in his life he had found a nest of least bitterns, nestled low in the cat-tails, but with what a thrill of admiration he had both times watched the mother-bird try to fool him, by exactly imitating in color and form the grey-brown cat-tail stalks about her, while the male bird,

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fluttering near, endeavored to head him away from the secret nest.

"If I cannot catch frogs, perhaps I can discover a nest full of young bitterns," he said with a little chuckle, as he began to closely examine the clump of cat-tails about him. His eyes were very sharp, his light was very bright, and he knew just where to look; and, besides, his luck had changed, for in a few moments, in spite of every effort of the clever bird-mother, first by stretching her slender neck and bill upward like a cat-tail stalk, and then by gently rotating her slender body in order to hide herself from view, Tater located her. As a bit of natural camouflage *she* was perfect, but not so the four birdies beside her. Their actions were perfectly correct, for they imitated their mother exactly, but their little featherless pink bodies showed plainly in the strong glare of the spot-light. Tater paused to watch the pretty spectacle. It was one of the most interesting bits of nature he had ever been privileged to see. But what was that caught on a broken bit of marsh-grass beside

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the nest? He worked his way closer to see what could possibly catch the gleam of his light and reflect it back again. He had never seen glowworms in the marsh, and he knew that fireflies never make a continuous light. Then a sudden inspiration flashed into the boy's mind. In a moment he was all excitement, yet how foolish of him, for it could not possibly be. He was within reach of the nest now and was bending over it. The mother had reluctantly flown a few feet away, leaving the helpless birdies. There before his eyes, in the heart of the marsh, hung the diamond necklace, the delicate gold chain caught fast, with the little string of diamonds glittering in the light. One or the other of the parent-birds, while feeding in the sand-beach, had picked it up and brought it to the nest.

Gently Tater lifted it to his hand, too surprised for speech, and then stumbled back to his boat. His weary, aching muscles were gone. His heart sang. He shouted for the very joy of it. The duck-boat was headed

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home. Twice he felt in his pocket to make sure. It seemed just like a dream to him—a fairy-story. Then suddenly he dropped his oars and sat stone-still.

"But no one will believe it."

"You found it by the merest chance," said the "wee voice." "By all rights it is yours. Why give it up for a mere reward? Why not sell it? No one will believe you found it. *They might say you stole it,* and thought up this extraordinary story to explain your having the thing in your possession." Tater listened—Tater considered. It was worth a thousand dollars. He could easily sell it in some far city for five hundred. Twice the reward and more; he would have money enough to return safely with and pay the doctor's bill beside—and —— His mind was suddenly in a wild turmoil. He was at his landing now, and soon he would be home. It never occurred to him that it was far into the night, and that his mother would be anxious. He was therefore startled to find her sitting at the boat-house weeping.

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"Oh, my boy," she sobbed. "I was afraid —afraid—for the load has been so heavy and you are so tired. I was afraid ——"

"Why, Mother!" exclaimed the surprised boy. "Afraid of what? I'm glad, so glad, you've come to meet me, Mother, for I need you. Oh, Mother, something wonderful has happened. I've rescued the Stonebridge diamonds—rescued them from robbers deep in the Corey marsh. I have them here! See! See!" and he held them before her.

As the two sat and talked excitedly on the sand under the yellow moon, Tater told his strange story with the result that, on the morrow, he and his mother drove away in the buggy to call on Miss Ethel Stonebridge, and came home again glad, for with them they had brought the redeemed mortgage to the "west sixty" and the everlasting gratitude of a lovely, gracious young lady that was to mean much to the whole Briggs household as the years rolled by.

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PIKE'S PEAK OR BUST

Story Four

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PIKE'S PEAK OR BUST

Story Four

BUGS PAR'S big bass was the main topic of conversation as the campers pulled into the fire. Strange how the sight of a fine large fish fresh from the water invariably suggests at least a dozen good fish-stories to every one in a crowd, and strange, too, how interesting they always are, even if you have heard them a dozen times before.

The boys tried to sing as usual, but to no avail. They tried a few games of blindfold boxing, but even this favorite only called forth a shadow of enthusiasm. There was nothing to do but let them finish catching all the "biggest trout in creation" and describe just how certain finny monsters had been lost from hook and line by the merest accident. Who the real hero of the camp was, when it came to fishing, would be hard indeed to determine, at least from the stories.

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"Now let's have a really true story," groaned Billy Evans. "My imagination is all whopple-jawed from these awful fairy-tales."

"Yes, yes, a really true story to-night," cried half a dozen, and the "Chief" smiled back at them.

"The Leader down in Three assured me his yarn is a true one," said the "Chief," "but I, for one, choose to withhold my judgment until he is through. After all the 'whoppers' I've listened to to-night, I have my very grave doubts if any one here *can* tell a strictly true tale. But see the fire, fellows; there never was a better one for a good story. Mr. Leader, we're ready."

"I'm going to tell you a true story about myself," said the Leader, with a good-natured laugh, "and there's no fish in it either":

The "Triumvirate" met as usual. I've been trying to recollect whether any one else ever referred to us three boys by that dignified name or not. I cannot be certain that

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they did, but that matters little, for we chose that title ourselves, and to our minds it was quite descriptive.

It was one of those first balmy spring days. The fragrant smell of fresh earth was in the air again, apparently just to remind us boys that it was time to forsake winter interest and turn again to the camp-fire and the long trail. We stood gazing at Pike's Peak's inviting summit.

"Let's be the very first ones to reach the Half-Way House this spring," said Phil eagerly, for he was hungry, like the rest of us, for a real hike into the mountains.

"Can't be first," said Al dryly; "Ben Jensen beat us to it. He was up two weeks ago. Told me about it only last night."

"But he didn't get to the big snow-banks at Windy Point," said Phil with conviction. "Let's go him one better. What do you say?"

"But he had a good excuse for not getting to them," persisted Al. "He told me that it looked pretty rough the day he was there, and

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in deciding whether to go or not he applied his only rule of woodcraft."

"*When in doubt, find out,*" chimed in Phil and I, with a hearty laugh, for we had had Jensen's one rule dished up to us on all sorts of occasions.

"Exactly," said Al. "The old guide at the Half-Way declared the trip cannot be made at this season."

"But that was two long weeks ago," cried Phil. "It's spring now. Look at those green buds; and say, wake up, didn't you hear that meadow-lark a while ago? It's spring!"

"Maybe," said Al. "But you don't suppose that bird's spring-song has melted all the big drifts on the Continental Divide, do you?"

"Wouldn't be surprised a bit," bantered Phil; "let's go see. I'll bet a doughnut the 'Triumvirate' can get to the bottom of Son-of-a-Gun Hill and back by sunset. Are you on? Let's go."

We were off, even if Al was a bit reluctant,

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and notwithstanding the fact that I was all togged out in a spring suit and low shoes. We hit the cog-rail road and began our ascent with great enthusiasm. We had climbed those same steep, graceful curves before,—by moonlight, by starlight, by no light at all, save the yellow glare of our folding lanterns. We were young; we were fit. We were as hard as nails, and a good stiff pull up a long winding grade was but a challenge to us to go on. In an hour the lure of the hills had us captive; city, home, parents, were forgotten in the indescribable thrill of getting into the great silent places after so long and strenuous a winter.

Below us the merry mountain torrent leaped in all her glory. Over us floated at intervals great convoys of wind-blown clouds, headed straight for the plains; but these, if we saw them at all, we failed utterly to interpret as significant to the lark in hand.

In an hour Sentinel Cliff lifted his grey-green, lichen-covered crown into the sky. This encouraged us. We were making prog-

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ress. In forty minutes more we sighted the old Log Lodge called Half-Way, and gleefully broke into a wild race to see which one of us could reach the rustic porch first. Phil beat us badly.

"I'm hungry," I confided. "Let's eat this chocolate, for I'm tired of carrying it—at least on the outside."

They liked my suggestion. We drank at the clear, cool stream and then knocked at the heavy log door of the cabin. We got no response. We tried the back entrance with the same result. We peered into the windows, but found no sign of life whatever.

"Where is he?" said Phil, a funny, puzzled expression on his face. "I didn't suppose Jerry ever slumbered or slept."

"He's gone to see the snow-banks," laughed Al. "He knew we were coming and he wanted to be first."

"When in doubt, find out," mimicked Al. "Let's go hunt him up. We have just an hour and a half to get there and back if we're going to reach home before dark; besides,

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I'm cold when we sit around. On, comrades! To the fray! Let's be gone!"

The Half-Way House sits really at the base of the majestic, bold old cliff that has become famous since that first intrepid pioneer, Zebulon Pike, named it, more than one hundred years ago. From the Half-Way House the valley flattens out and runs for many miles in broad, green lowlands, the ancient home, no doubt, of a once stupendous glacier. Above this valley rises the main peak, bleak and austere, yet inviting in all its matchless majesty. We stopped to gaze at it now, with its usual rugged wrinkles, buried deep in a great blanket of snow.

The level grade through the park was a great relief to us after the stiff pull up Cameron's. Here the railroad winds in and out through many a pretty grove of aspens. We stopped to cut our usual walking-stick and then went on our way merrily. We had trailed along at a good fast gait for nearly thirty minutes when suddenly we came head-on into a cold mist that was driving fast

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in the breeze. I shivered and wished inwardly that my spring suit was at home.

"Nothing but a baby storm hunting for its mother," laughed Phil. "Come on, let's go." We were off again, but the mist cloud proved not to be a baby at all, but a fairly well-grown child. Ahead of us we could see the snow. In ten minutes we came quite as suddenly onto another storm-cloud, and then another, and another, and yet we tramped on.

"If those are only baby storms," said Al a bit reflectively, "I'd hate to meet the mother. It's going to storm before morning or I'm mistaken."

"It may somewhere," I suggested, "but not here, for those clouds are headed straight out of the valley."

We reached Son-of-a-Gun and found snow, and, to our delight, it was frozen over with a hard crust, so we determined to go on.

"Ben said there were forty feet of snow at least in the big cut," said Al. "That's the most there has been for years. I'd like to see it." That was the sentiment of us all, so we

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climbed on. My wet feet were getting disturbingly cold, yet I was quite willing to suffer for the honor of the "Triumvirate."

"Let's cut off around that shoulder," said Phil. "It's shorter and we'll get out of the wind. Come on, we've got to hustle or we won't get back to Half-Way by dark."

We followed him with the best we had, but I had developed a goodly water-blister on each heel as the result of my new shoes, and no one but myself knew what I was suffering for the unsullied honor of the gang.

Ahead of us lay timber-line. How strange it looked that day, resembling a straggly rim of hair about a great bald head. The pines grew more and more dwarfed and distorted as they squatted in the frozen snow. Some were prostrate in the drifts, others were so wind-blown as to be quite lopsided. Dwarfed and gnarled they were from many a wintry struggle.

We were making splendid headway, and would have reached our destination in safety, if the unexpected hadn't overtaken us. As

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we rounded the ridge ahead we came head-on into an icy blast. It rushed at us with a hiss, going through my clothes like a shower of needles. We stopped suddenly and faced each other, but this time without a laugh.

"Well," said Al with not a little of the "I told you so" in his voice, "what now? In forty minutes or sooner it will be dark. It's a good three-quarters of a mile to Windy Point yet. What say you?"

Plainly Phil was disappointed; his face said so. I was neutral. I would have been perfectly willing to start back at once, but then *we* had never failed before.

"If we go back now, our charm is broken. It's good-night 'Great Triumvirate'!" said Phil. "We'll have to change our name to 'Molly-coddles' or—or something worse."

"Come on, then," said Al; "let's get to going." It was easier said than done in my case, but we finally got under way. It was at this point that the second unforeseen thing came to pass. Suddenly, without so much as a flutter, that icy wind veered straight into

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the south, and such a wind as it proved to be! Talking became an impossibility. We just struggled on like lost animals. At last I protested, but it was no use. Our reputation was at stake and we must reach Windy Point. We floundered on in the unbroken fury of the gale. It began to snow, and with the first frozen flakes the air-currents lost themselves in an orgy of passionate swirls. The surging gust fairly drew the wind from our lungs while we stood impotent in the wild fury. We tried to shelter ourselves behind a clump of wind-blown trees. We might as well have sought safety from a fire behind gauze. Seconds became minutes. Decision changed to indecision. Our jolly chatter became gloomy prophecy. And then it snowed. Never before had I seen it snow as it did the next few moments. The flakes were large and wet, clinging to everything they came in contact with. Ahead of us, less than a thousand feet, rose the snow-banks, but they were lost in the hissing, swirling swishes of the blizzard.

"This is a very serious matter," said Phil,

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"and I'm to blame. Now think clearly, and let's see what's best to do. Ten to one it's but a local storm; probably a few hundred feet higher up the mountains there is no snow falling, and probably very little wind."

"It's sure death to go down," said Al thoughtfully. "The valley is a raging maelstrom. These storms fall, I've been told. They rarely rise. The change of wind is bringing it out of the Bottomless Pit. Let's make an effort to get higher."

"But I'm freezing," I protested. "My shoes are full of snow. I'm wet to the knees. I'm catching my death of cold."

"Take my coat," said Phil. "I'm warm as toast. There, do." But my pride wouldn't let me, for I belonged to the "Triumvirate."

We made a start. Every step was torture to me. We stumbled over old trees that stuck out of the snow. We fell headlong over partially-buried rocks, but struggled on. I was soon exhausted. I fell into the snow. I couldn't help it. The others helped me to my feet and begged me to try to get a little

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further, promising to stop at the very first bit of exposed timber and build a fire. We struggled on. The wind swept by with a wild roar, making the most eloquent efforts to frighten us back. At last we came to the great outstretched arm of an ancient fire-killed pine. Here Phil insisted on leaving us while he looked about a bit for loose wood or better shelter. He was back in a few moments with the good news of a sort of pocket blown clear of snow. We snuggled in together for warmth, but we were cramped and very weary, and soon realized that we would all freeze if we stayed there long. Phil was first out. Then Al joined him and together they sought such pieces of wood as they could find. Together they hastened back and we knelt about a tiny pile of pitchy slivers that they were able to make with their pocket-knives. But lighting a match in that wind was like keeping a candle aflame in a hurricane. We became desperate; fingers shook and teeth chattered in the cold. I kicked my feet against the rock to keep the circulation

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going. Again we attempted to light our little faggot. We were all on our knees now, shielding the tiny pile as best we could. Finally the resinous chips smoked, then caught aflame, and in a few moments we had a tiny blaze. Phil and Al went for more wood, but found practically none. Such as there was, was completely snowed under.

We held a council of war. What should we do? Every possible procedure was talked over and discussed. We might go ahead to the summit and break into the Summit House. We might endeavor to get to Half-Way. Above us all was clear and cold, below us all was fog and clouds. Probably the Half-Way was experiencing the blizzard that had just passed over us. If so, it would be difficult to live in the valley, even if we were fortunate enough to find our way. On the other hand, the Summit House was no doubt completely snowed under, and, if not, most assuredly well locked up. To stay where we were meant certain death, for the mercury was falling rapidly. It was a still, clear cold

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that went into one's bones. We avoided looking at each other, for each one knew that the other was trying his best to be brave.

As we stood and debated, we saw the first signs of the rising moon away beyond Cameron's. True, it was nothing more than a yellow tint in the sky as yet, but we knew that in an hour it would be up sufficiently to at least give us light. Phil, after nearly exhausting himself, finally succeeded in bringing in one more piece of wood. Al found a bit of a gnarled old stump, and with this scant supply we settled down as best we could to await the moon. We sat with our feet in the fire, so cold were they and so wet. Too weary were we to be cautious, even careful. Twice I dozed off to sleep, only to be awakened by a rude shake from Phil.

"Come, come," he said, almost sternly; "if you go to sleep there, you'll never wake up." His words frightened me. I got to my feet, only to find that my shoes were stiff and hot and burned. I examined them with horror. The soles were as crisp as a piece of toast, and

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my weight on them pained me so I stumbled to my knees. I was about to take them off when Phil interfered.

"Don't," he commanded; "you could never get them on again, and then you would be lost." We snuggled close to the stingy blaze with many a glum foreboding. We had sat thus some moments when from somewhere there came the unmistakable crunch, crunch of a heavy body moving over the snow. I heard it first and jumped to my feet.

"I hear some one," I said softly but excitedly.

Phil was certain that we were mistaken.

"We're really pretty bad off, fellows," he said in all seriousness; "for when you get so cold that you begin to hear things and see things that aren't there, you're about a gonner. I wish the moon would come up."

We stood all eager expectancy, our ears trained to catch the faintest sound, but we could hear nothing or see nothing, save endless stretches of white, glistening in the starlight. And then the moon came up. Slowly

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it peeked over the crest of pine-clad Cameron and shone down the huge boiling mass of storm-clouds that were being tossed about in the valley below by the freakish air-currents, like so many toy balloons.

"No man could go through that valley this night," said Phil thoughtfully. "We have but one chance left on earth of ever getting back alive, and that's in reaching the Summit House. We are about as high up as Windy Point. The telegraph line follows the track farther to the south side. We'd better hit for the line of poles and follow them. We could easily enough step off into some great crevasse out here where we are. Come on, old top," speaking to me; "get a stiff upper lip, for you've got to go too. The 'Triumvirate' never separates. We'll either all find safety or none of us. Come on. This trio has met its Waterloo."

Together we pushed on. Sometimes we'd founder and fall. Sometimes our feet would slip out from under us, but no one complained. Phil had saved his green walking-

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staff, and we all took hold of it now and tried going it in a row, three abreast, instead of behind each other. We made progress. Then suddenly we became aware of that same something behind us again. When we stopped, it stopped; when we started, it started. We mustered our courage and all shouted together, veritable blood-curdling yells, but the snow-banks only hurled them back in resounding echoes.

"It must be a mountain lion," said Phil very thoughtfully. "Nothing else would venture so high."

"Our fire," said Al, by way of explanation.

"Yes," said Phil. "They are very curious beasts. I've heard of them following men through the mountains for days but never attacking.

"We must keep moving," said Phil determinedly. "If we stop we're lost."

"See yonder," breathed Al excitedly. We all looked in the direction he indicated, and there, outlined against the snow, and hardly

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more than four feet out of it, stood a row of telegraph poles. We made for them and then began to climb.

I had been doing some rapid thinking. I was about exhausted. My feet and fingers were numb. I was terribly sleepy. At last I spoke my thoughts. "Fellows, I'm strapped," I whispered. "I cannot go another foot. Scoop out a hole in the snow and leave me. It's foolish for you two to freeze because I do."

Phil looked at Al, Al at Phil. Then Phil said with almost a snarl, "No, 'Skeeter,' you go too." Then, turning to Al, he added: "We'll fasten him to this pole and together we've got to drag him. If we leave him, we'll never find him. Al, are you good for it?" Al didn't answer, but between them they got me over that stout aspen pole and we began again. I helped all I could, but it was very little.

Once more I begged them to leave me, but they would not. Both were silent, but determined. Pulling me was terrific labor, for I

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leaned more heavily every second until finally the aspen broke in two. I pleaded *again* that they leave me, but this time Phil was very outspoken and angry. He absolutely refused. Together they dragged me on. In perhaps thirty minutes the telegraph poles began to lengthen, which indicated less snow, and that we were getting higher onto the ridge. As the poles increased in length, however, the wind increased also, until there was considerable snow blowing. In a comparatively open place they lay me down in order to rest their aching arms. We looked down from our great height onto a polar world, silent and glistening. I was scarcely conscious of their presence. Phil warned me over and over not to go to sleep, and I did my best. We had perhaps plodded on another twenty minutes,—to me it seemed hours,—when suddenly Phil stumbled and fell over something. In a second he let out a joyful yell: "It's the Summit House!"

"You rest a second and I'll see," cried Al.

In a few moments he called out, and I

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could tell from his tone that we were actually on the summit of Pike's Peak.

"She's snowed into the roof, Phil," I heard him tell, "except on the north side where the wind has made an eddy. There are two window-openings partly exposed, but they are both protected by steel shutters."

"Come, let's get to the building," said Phil, "and we'll see. While there's life there's hope. Come on."

They dragged me to that snow eddy, a strange wind-carved bowl in the great drift. Together we slid into it like so many ants on a sand-bank. Phil minutely examined the shutters. Then he turned, slipped out of his coat, and wrapped it carefully about me.

"They're fastened from the inside, too," he said, "and they fit into slats in the wall. If I could only get my fingers under the bottom, I might ——"

Finally I saw him brace himself, sturdy little giant that he was, and pull. Again he tried, but to no avail. Al wound his hands about Phil's middle and together they pulled,

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but there was only the slightest particle of give.

"If we but had something to save what I can gain with each pull," cried Phil. For this purpose Al got off what was left of one of my shoes. Phil braced himself again, Al ready to force the shoe into the slightest opening. I began to cry. I was nervously exhausted and absolutely could not control myself.

"We'll save you yet," breathed Phil confidently. "The 'Triumvirate' is not going to be beaten."

He pulled with superhuman strength. The shutter gave a mite. He pulled again, and under went the shoe. He gave a last mighty yank. The steel shutter bent in the middle and then came out with a clatter and a bang. Phil battered out the double windows and then I remembered no more until I awoke several hours later. Al lay on the floor, sprawled out as dead. I was on a table and Phil was bending over me with a box of snow, rubbing first my hands and then my

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feet. At the far end of the big room I saw something glowing red-hot. I asked Phil if it was really there, and he assured me that it was the stove, and that it was gradually dispelling the cold; furthermore that my feet and hands and Al's face were so frozen he dared not take us to the fire.

"Al is terribly sick," he added. "I'm so glad you've come to. I must go to him now. I have snow melting on the stove." He moved away from me. As I lay still I heard that same mysterious crunch, crunch, but this time it was overhead on the roof. I called to Phil.

"Yes, it's out there," he said, "but don't worry. I have the windows where we came in blocked with boards and chairs."

"But, Phil," I cried, "what are those things running about? See! See!" And I struggled to get to my feet, for not two yards from me stood a four-legged something with eyes of jet.

"Rats, boy," said Phil,—"millions of them. The place is alive with them. I've

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thrown things at them until I'm tired. They're in a panic. I don't think they'll attack you, but watch out; here is a club." He handed me a piece of shelving that he had split for the fire. I tried to strike at the fiendish things, but I was too weak. Finally I lay and gazed at them fascinated. They came and went like animated shadows,—singly, in couples, and in droves. Mountain rats! I never supposed there were such rats in the world. They looked as big as rabbits to me, fierce black-eyed rats with twitching noses and tails a foot in length.

Phil was back now, rubbing my feet again. "I'm going to move you a bit nearer the fire."

He gathered me in his strong arms. He lifted me from the table, then suddenly dropped me with a startled exclamation, for with a crash the boards at his barred entrance clattered to the floor in a heap. My blood turned cold. Phil grabbed up a great meat-cleaver he had found in the kitchen and stood ready for the attack. I had gotten to my feet

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and stood shivering. Breathlessly we waited, expecting every second to see the head of a mountain lion thrust through the broken sash. We waited in vain. The next instant that same crunch, crunch came again on the roof. Phil dropped his weapon.

"That blamed wind," he muttered, as he went to rearrange the boards over the opening again.

Strange as it may seem, it had never occurred to any of us to once look at a watch since we had left our little fire, away back at timber-line. With difficulty I pulled mine out. "Five-twenty-seven," I said slowly. "It will be getting daylight in an hour." Yet I'm sure that was the longest hour of our lives. Then morning came, and the rats vanished save an occasional one that came out to reconnoiter.

"Well, we're here, safe and warm and all alive," said Phil, as we gathered in about the stove. "We ought to be thankful for that. It was a close call for the 'Triumvirate,' but, gents, we can't stay long, for, so far as I'm

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able to find out, these rats have eaten everything that was ever eatable. We can't survive long on fresh air and arctic scenery, even if it is very beautiful."

"Travel down will be much worse than travel up," added Al; "and, some way, I feel all cold in the middle."

"I've been thinking of that slipping business considerably," said Phil. "Now, here's what we can do. We must improvise some snowshoes from pieces of boards. We can tie them on, for there is plenty of rope. We'll have to burn holes through the boards with that poker and then wrap our feet in strips of that old tent-fly. 'Skeeter's' shoes here are absolutely gone, and he has a very bad pair of feet. We'll each adapt one of these broom-sticks for a pole and then we must risk it. I think an early start desirable."

"Now, that's great, Phil," said Al. "You did all the thinking while I was sleeping. Now while I make those aforesaid snowshoes you've got to sleep. If you'd peter out on the way down, it might yet cost one of us our

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lives. I'm awfully light-headed. It may be just the altitude, but you can't tell. Now don't argue—go do it."

"But I hate to waste an hour," complained Phil. "You must not forget our folks. Man, they will be wild long before this. If they go to the high school about us, just as like as not they'll get out a lot of searching-parties and that will make more excitement. It wouldn't be so bad if we three didn't have so many crazy exploits to our credit. Poor Mother. I can see the grey hairs that have come already."

"But they'll be glad we're safe," said Al.

"Yes," continued Phil, "but we aren't yet, and can't possibly be before late afternoon. But perhaps you're right. I ought to rest. I'm on such high tension I hate to let down for fear I won't come back,—physically, I mean."

Finally he agreed to sleep two hours, if we'd promise to waken him. We agreed that we would, and he went into the other room to sleep, closing the door behind him. I watched

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Al work, and deep in my own soul was sorely chagrined that I must lie still and do nothing.

I lay a long while thinking, and then a very happy thought came to me.

"Al," I cried, "didn't you say it was a perfectly clear morning?"

"Yes, clear as a bell and as crisp as January. Not a cloud."

"Then I have a great idea. Listen to me. No doubt the morning paper has a front pager 'Three Boys Lost in the Mountains in Fierce Spring Blizzard.'"

"No doubt," said Al laconically. "I'll bet my mother has been to my funeral at least a dozen times already this morning. Honest, I'm ashamed of myself all over."

"But listen, Al. Don't you remember how all last summer Ben Jensen used to flash signals from up here down to his girl. He used a mirror and she flashed back. I've watched them often."

"Yes," said Al, thoroughly interested. "By Jove, kid, that's an idea. If anybody looks this way this morning, they are bound

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to see it, and somebody will have sense enough to guess that it's the Great Trio."

"Exactly," I said. "It's worth a try. If we can't do any better, we can take the door off one of those showcases. See, they all have mirrors in them."

In five minutes Al was busy on the tower of the old signal station, with the door from a showcase in his hands, signaling for all he was worth. In a few moments he came back, his face beaming.

"Kid, I've had another brainstorm. I've tied that mirror fast, and the breeze moves it back and forth, just as if I were holding it. It will work that way till the sun gets too high. Now we must get these snowshoes done before Phil wakes up. Here, you string the ropes into the ones I have done, and then tear up this canvas. Boy, those are terrible-looking feet you have. You parboiled them and then froze them. I do hope you won't lose any of your toes."

Together we worked with a will. We were just finishing our task when Phil woke up

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with a start and came stumbling out. We greeted him with the news and he was much pleased.

"'Skeeter,'" he said, "you're little, but oh my! I've always been jealous of brains. Boys, I've been thinking of what three very excited fathers are probably saying."

"So have I," said Al earnestly. "Now let's get to going."

We carefully wrapped our feet and tied on the clumsy wooden shoes. With some difficulty we got through the window, for we were all stiff and sore and lame; yet we were three as determined boys as ever stood on the summit of Pike's Peak.

We started down, Al on my one side and Phil on the other, the snowshoes proving a wonderful help. We made progress. Every now and then we turned to look back, to see if our automatic signal was still flashing messages. To our great joy it was.

We were amazed at the huge banks of snow that we saw on every hand. It was nothing short of a miracle that we had not dropped

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off in the dark into one of the thousands of great eddies that the wind had scooped out. Slowly and painfully we descended, stopping very often to rest. We talked little, we were too weary. In two hours we were past Windy Point. In three, we were well on our way down Son-of-a-Gun. The valley was covered with snow, and everything was as slippery as glass. By eleven we hit the flat valley, and here we threw away our snow-shoes.

We were resting and drinking by a gurgling stream when I heard a faint halloo. We waited ten minutes, then hallooed again. Phil had gone on ahead to where he could see farther down the valley.

Just then a man hove into our sight, jacketed and bundled until we could hardly see him. Two loose sweaters hung about his neck. A coil of rope was hung at his side, and over all was a heavy blanket-roll. We hurried to him.

"It's Ben Jensen," cried Al in wild excitement.

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So it proved to be, and Ben Jensen could not have been any more pleased to have found his very own than he was to see us three tired, hungry, tottering boys.

"How did *you* know to come?" said Phil, after the first exclamations.

"Saw the paper," he panted; "saw the flash from the summit. Made up my mind that such a trick was just like the 'Triumvirate,' and then I started."

"But you told us it couldn't be done," cried Al.

"That's just why I was sure you'd try it. I wouldn't have risked myself last night on old Pike's Peak for a cold thousand. You've got the town mad. The high school is out scouring the hills, and your folks—well, you can just imagine. They're simply wild, too. And you must be starved. Here, I stuck these into my pocket. Now go easy, only a little at a time, and chewed well.

"Your fathers are coming farther down, but I came on ahead. They are a silent, gloomy lot, all of them. You have frightened

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them badly, and you'll have to square yourselves."

"We can do that," we said in a chorus, and we did by simply telling the Gospel truth.

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THREE TENDERFEET AND A HAY-BURNER

Story Five

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THREE TENDERFEET AND A HAY-BURNER

Story Five

IT was a stormy night. All day the rain had poured down in veritable torrents until everything in camp was damp and soaked, even to a good many dispositions. It was hard to laugh, even at funny things, and some of the campers, the greenhorns and tenderfeet of course, had even gone so far as to wish that they were home with dry feet and warm blankets.

When night came, of course, it was too wet for a fire outside, but some of the few, who had persistently refused to let a summer shower dampen their spirits, were bound to have a camp-fire. Accordingly the big mess-tent was cleared, and every lantern in camp was brought in, lighted, and set close together. Then a gaudy red blanket was carefully dropped over them, and the campers

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were invited to sit about the make-believe blaze.

Every one was compelled to tell a funny story, and if the crowd did not laugh, he must tell another and another until he was successful. In half an hour the clouds of gloom were scattered, and when some one suggested that they sing "Old Noah He Built Himself an Ark," the whole camp broke loose.

When quiet was again restored, some one called for the evening story. In the fun it had been nearly overlooked. The make-shift fire was again adjusted and the circle formed.

"Stop scratching your head, Shortie," called Bugs Par. "I smell smoke."

"You've a hot-box in your imagination," retorted Shortie.

"Let's have the story," demanded Tommie, and so the Leader of Tent Four began:

"Eureka, Eureka," cried Happy, as he slapped Bill Brent, and then Dwight Delaney, a stinging but friendly blow on the

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shoulder. He gave them no opportunity to greet him, but continued:

"In the classic phrase of some wise old gazabo, 'I've discovered it at last.' Gents, I've had two bright ideas in a row and almost in the same breath. To be scientifically exact, I believe they are twins—anyway they're related ——"

"Well, no doubt, but what are you talking about?" groaned Billy with a wry face. "Do you really know something, or have you just been reading another fashion journal?"

"Happy, you're always enthusiastic,—I believe you'd rave in a mosquito swamp,—but it takes you so everlasting long to get the yarn out. Who's Eureka? Sounds German and I don't like it," was Dwight's comment.

Happy looked from one to the other with his usual good-natured smile, but refused to be hurried. "There's nothing I like so well as keeping you two in suspenders," he laughed. "You take life so blooming seriously. Think you owned Wall Street to look into your gloomy, worried physiogs. Come,

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let's get young again. You're no poorer than I am. We're all in the same boat so far as coin goes, but we've got to have a bit of vacation anyway. Let's take a trip and go it together."

"A trip," groaned Billy a second time, as he produced three lonesome dimes from somewhere; "over what?"

"Let's make it the North Pole," said Dwight in deep disgust. "I'm so hot to-day I've melted and run into my boots."

"Yes, a trip, gents,—a real, sure-enough jaunt. I'm weary of these asphalt pavements and the ducks in the pond at the park. I'm tired of everybody and everything. I want to wander in the 'everlasting shade of some far-away little valley,' in the language of the poet, 'where the birds sing night and day and the insects chirp and the flowers nod, and ——'"

"And the keeper comes around after a while and says, 'Back in your padded cell, simp,'" snarled Billy in deep disgust. "Come, Dwight, this chump has been reading

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a summer-vacation number this time and has got 'em."

"Got 'em? I should say I have, and, what's more, gents," cried Happy in high glee, "you're going to get 'em too. Come, listen to me. See this advertisement? '*Pack Mules for Hire Cheap. Address 7980.*' That's us,—'cheap.' See—probably let you have a Jack for his feed."

"Three office-weary adventurers—nearly broke—long, endless, pine-shaded trails that lead forever back into some almost forgotten valley along a wildly lifting, foam-bedecked stream of crystal H_2O! A little grub, a gun or two, a blanket 'purloined'—get that—from Mother's spare room, a ravenous appetite, a few old duds, my tent, and a kodak, all loaded onto a 'hay-burner.' We'll travel Shanks' mare, and —— Say, why don't you warm up a little? Neither your boss, nor mine, with all their limosines and golf clubs, has anything on that,—a week together 'deep in the everlasting hills,' and all for less than a week's pay."

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Happy had won. Will and Dwight *were* interested, and together they read the advertisement again:

"Pack Mules for Hire Cheap. Address 7980."

"What do *you* know about packing a Jack?" demanded Billy scornfully, determined not to allow his personal-enthusiasm thermometer to rise too quickly. "You got to be an artist at throwing a diamond hitch and all that sort of thing, to go camping like that. Shucks! Who's going to cook, and who's going to shoot the game, and who's going to guide?"

"Easy," cautioned the irrepressible Happy, with a deep curtsy. *"We are.* We're going to make that old yarn about 'We killed a bear' look like a mother-goose rhyme. We're going to pack and hunt and cook and sleep on browse beds and 'study wild nature in her native haunts.' *We are,* gents! I know you've never been farther into the hills than the end of the trolley. I realize full well, Bill, that you don't know which end

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of a match lights first, let alone being expert at boiling water. I'm persuaded that Dwight will need some one to wash his face and wipe his chin, but I've thought that all out. *I've bought a guide-book,* a book of woodcraft and camping, and we're going to study it. It tells you in minutest detail which side of a flapjack to cook first, and how to get along six days in the woods with nothing but a piece of string and your imagination. There's a chapter on diamond hitches and one on equipment and one on backwoods medicine and surgery ——"

"We'll need that all right," laughed Dwight.

"And one on edible wild plants, and one on how to make signals when you're lost in the woods, and one on—on when not to do it and why."

"Why not to do what?" blinked Bill with a sheepish grin.

"It," thundered the enthusiastic Happy. "It! It! Anything from how to singe the pin-feathers off a squirrel to picking a porcu-

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pine. All we've got to do is to read the book a few times and get our stuff together and go. Why, I'm so excited I can hardly wait. Let's go rent that 'hay-burner' now, kids. They may be having a sale on 'em and they'll all get picked over. I'll pasture the brute in my back yard till we're ready to start. It's only two weeks, and ——"

"It's a go," cried Bill and Dwight in unison.

"To the hills we go," sang Billy in a high falsetto. "And, Happy, by common consent, you are hereby unanimously elected animal trainer and information bureau of this expedition. If we get stuck, it's up to you to find the answer in the book."

"I'm game," smiled back Happy. "Now let's make application for our 'hay-burner.'"

When the boys applied at the ranch they found "Peanuts," a little brown, shaggy-haired quadruped with both long ears split from top to bottom. So far as the boys could determine, he had joints in his legs, but they

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didn't seem to work, for the brute walked about stiff-legged.

"He's absolutely broke to harness," the owner had declared. "He'll stand anywhere, and can carry three hundred pounds without the slightest difficulty. He'll live off the country. You won't need to take hay or oats. Just turn him loose at night and let him forage. No, he won't go away. 'Jacks' are gregarious and like to be with their own kind. You never need fear; he won't stray with you boys in camp."

"Peanuts" seemed conscious that his owner was commenting about his sterling qualities, so he just opened his great maw and emitted one long, elegant, musical bray that was designed to wake the dead and at the same time impress the would-be mountaineers of his friendly and good-natured disposition.

"Hope you'll have a nice time," the rancher had added; "and if 'Peanuts' don't live up to all I've said of him, your money's here waiting for you. He's a wise old jack, and he knows these hills just like a book.

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Don't need to worry a minute about getting lost with him along. He's as intelligent as a Swiss guide. Tell him where you want to go and he'll take you."

The boys were delighted, and made ready to start home, but "Peanuts" was loath to leave his hay and a known master to follow after three greenhorns. Twice on the way home he balked completely, refusing to respond to any sort of treatment. At first it was funny, then it grew tiresome, and finally Billy got sarcastic.

"Better look in the book, Happy; no doubt it will tell you what to do. You probably apply a mustard poultice or gently chastise the brute with a fly-swatter."

Happy was serious for once, for he had come off without the guide-book, and, to save his life, he could not remember what the book did say to do under such circumstances.

"Let's build a fire under him," suggested Dwight. "I've heard of doing that."

No one had a match, or likely "Peanuts" would have gotten a bit singed up.

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"Oh, I know," cried Happy at last. "When a beast of burden balks, you just blow in his ear. Let's try it."

It worked like a charm. In fact, "Peanuts" was delighted, and, after taking three or four leisurely steps, he stopped again and waited with ears forward for the caress.

"That's it," said Billy disgustedly. "Happy, use some more of your hot air on the brute. He likes it."

It was dark that Saturday night when the trio finally got "Peanuts" safely lodged behind a six-foot picket fence and wended their weary ways home to look up a blanket or two and to gather together such other plunder as they had agreed they might need.

The eventful day came, warm and pleasing, as only a Colorado summer day can be. The distant snow-caps were almost purple in the soft haze, and seemed to be beckoning the trio to come far back into their mysterious fern-lined flower-gardens. For two hours the boys had been experimenting with the pack, and finally it was arranged to their satisfac-

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tion. The poor little brown beast groaned under the heavy load and staggered uneasily. Several times he pointed his long ears toward the big hills, as if he, too, heard some mysterious voice calling him to the long trail.

The first day out was a joy; spirits ran high, and every mile of winding trail only served to beckon them on. They laughed and romped like so many puppies in the sunshine. They chased each other about great pine stumps, they photographed everything that crossed their paths, and simply reveled in the freedom of the great open places. Many a frightened squirrel paused that day to look back at the happy little caravan.

Night found them by the side of a purling stream. "Peanuts" was unpacked and turned loose to graze. An open fireplace was built according to directions on page two-twenty of the guide-book. Happy was elected cook, while Bill and Dwight busied themselves chopping great heaps of pine boughs with which to make their beds and thatch a roof over their heads. Night over-

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took them long before they were through, but they stopped long enough to "eat a bite." Happy had a kettle of hot tomato soup, and a pan of sizzling bacon, and a pot of coffee that certainly hit the spot.

Everything was perfect, and they ate like grizzlies that had recently come forth after a long winter's nap. Everything exactly suited everybody, and fellowship reigned. Even "Peanuts" seemed to feel at home, for he stood with his long neck hanging in the black pine-smoke and seemed to enjoy every odor that came from the cooking supper. All were in high spirits, and after the meal was over they lolled back, weary in every muscle, onto the great stack of pine boughs, and looked out through the faintly lighted fringed pine-tops at the myriads of stars that somehow seemed much closer to the boys than they ever had in the city.

They were too tired to properly arrange their camp or to put their grub-bags away, and so everything just lay. They would do better to-morrow night. After a little chat-

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ting the camp became quiet, and soon every one was asleep, all save "Peanuts."

All evening he had waited patiently to be fed, but was entirely forgotten. He seemed to realize that it was an oversight, and there was no particular resentment apparent in his big kindly eyes. He had been forgotten before, but somehow he had always been able to look out for himself. Nature had given him an excellent "smeller," and it usually led him to relief.

The fire burned low. A big owl swung noiselessly down to pick up a scrap of bacon that had been dropped. On the moonlit summit of a neighboring bluff a gaunt coyote sent its plaintive howl out over the valley, but the three boys slept. They were dead. "Peanuts" quietly surveyed the situation and then moved stealthily over to the cluttered assortment of grub-bags. Unerringly his nose found the bag of oatmeal. One quick twist of his long neck and the contents lay at his feet. How good and sweet it tasted! Next came the sugar bag, which, unfortunately,

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Happy had failed to tie in his haste. Then the precious bag of "spuds" followed. Slowly and with great relish "Peanuts" ate them up clean and then moved leisurely off to the stream to drink and to hunt a few tender clusters of bunch-grass.

Happy was first up. Consternation filled his heart and he rushed for the gun.

"We've been robbed, fellows!" he cried in his excitement. "A bear has been here in the night. See there, and there! Lucky I hung that side of bacon high or else we'd be meatless. Well, well, and we never heard a sound. We must be more careful another time. Had no idea we were back that far into the wilderness. Maybe the brute will follow our trail and try again to-night. I'm going to be on the watch."

The little trio ate their breakfast in silence, each one blaming the other, deep in his heart, for all the aching muscles and the lost food. Several times they tried fishing that day, but to no avail, for, as Billy said, he "didn't even get a mosquito bite." Happy shot at a huge

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black squirrel, but of course he wasn't lucky. The old rifle was in poor shape anyway, and the first shot completely leaded the barrel. Billy had his own ideas about why it had happened, but he kept still.

"Look in the book," Dwight had suggested. "It surely ought to tell how to get a lead out of a rifle-barrel."

A careful search, however, failed to disclose the desired information, and so the miserable gun was put onto the already too heavy pack.

Billy, early that day, developed a great water-blister on each heel, and in consequence soon ignored the "long rows of majestic pines," "the gorgeous little flower-gardens," and all the rest of the scenery, for that matter. If he had been normal, of course it would never have occurred to him to have blamed those torturing, oozing blisters onto Happy, but he wasn't normal.

"I wish you had one of them on the end of your nose and the other on your chin," he growled, trying desperately to be angry. Happy only laughed.

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Just before noon they found it necessary to ford the stream, for the bridge was gone. "Peanuts," however, positively refused. They coaxed and pleaded and threatened, but to no avail. Happy finally had a bright idea. Gathering a nice bunch of green, tender grass, he waded in and teased the burro to follow. Very gingerly "Peanuts" stepped into the water, but evidently much against his will, for he quivered and shook like an aspen leaf in the wind. Happy was leading by the bridle, Bill was persuading with a goodly club, while Dwight did his best to steady the top-heavy pack. Half-way over "Peanuts" stopped and gave vent to two verses of his native song. Happy fairly yowled with delight, and Dwight laughed so hard that momentarily he released his steadying hand on the pack, and in an instant "Peanuts" had slipped on a smooth stone. There was a splash, a great yell of consternation, but it was too late. "Peanuts" had calmly sat down on his haunches while the water raced merrily over the entire pack. He was about

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to bray again when Billy cracked him sharply across the nose with his switch. The burro dodged, slipped again, and then lay flat just long enough to soak every single article of the entire pack, including the grub; then, with a tremendous effort, he got to his feet and walked calmly through to the other bank.

Billy was for annihilating the brute on the spot. Dwight was morally certain that if Happy had had sense enough to let go the reins it never would have happened. Happy was overjoyed. It was more fun and excitement than he had had for many a day. "Peanuts," however, was angry. "What fools these mortals be," he said as plain as any mule ever said anything, and in that instant revenge was born in his heart.

They started on, but the pack was now so heavy the little jack could only stagger under it. Twice he squatted in the road, a helpless mass of legs and blankets and pack-sacks. The trio lifted and tugged and pried and pulled, and finally they got the overloaded little brute onto his feet again.

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Just how it happened no one knew, but in some strange way the sleeve of Happy's raincoat had got out of the pack, and, as luck would have it, hung directly over "Peanuts'" right fore leg in such a way that every jog slapped the wet sleeve down kerflap on his right shoulder. This angered the shaggy little beast, and finally he determined to rid himself of it once for all. The trio had seen bucking bronchos at the movies, but never one that held a candle to "Peanuts." He acted as if he was hung on a pivot; head down—tail up; head up—tail down, alternating about every second and a half, and always stiff-legged.

"And my kodak is strapped on the pack," groaned Happy.

"No, it isn't," shouted Bill in wild excitement. "There it goes now, and the axe and the gun and the fishing-poles and my blankets ——

"Whoopee! And the frying-pan, and now my sweater and my razor-kit," yelled Billy.

Just then the flour bag burst and flour filled the air; then the lid came off the pepper

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can and the whole contents lighted fairly on "Peanuts'" head. The boys were convulsed. They laughed until they cried, while "Peanuts" bucked on, determined to rid himself of every ounce. The boys had seen jugglers that could keep a dozen china cups in the air at once, but this was nothing compared to having a whole camp equipment on the move. In reality it lasted but a few seconds, but the wreck was complete. "Peanuts" viewed the ruins through tear-dimmed and smarting eyes, then moved off to a patch of ripe thistle-heads and calmly fed.

It was late afternoon when the boys succeeded in completing the pack again. They were sure they had salvaged everything worth the saving.

"I'm going to sleep standing up to-night," said Billy. "No soaking wet blankets for me."

"There's an old cabin up in here somewhere," said Happy. "Perhaps we can find it. If so, we're all right. Keep your eyes open."

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About five o'clock they sighted the old ruin and made joyfully for it. A rousing fire was built in the fireplace and everything in the pack was spread out to dry. Such a collection of odds and ends you never saw. The food was practically ruined save for the few cans of goods that fortunately had been included. Happy busied himself at the kitchen stove trying to make a few biscuits with the remnants of the sack of flour. He had the guidebook up in front of him and was doing his best as a cook. Billy was toiling over a can of beans with an old pair of scissors that he had found on the wall, and Dwight was renovating the piles of old boughs in the bunks.

Just as they sat down to their meager supper it began to rain—not a shower, but a genuine mountain downpour. "Peanuts" stood with his head down, disconsolate, hungry, perplexed to know what ailed his peppery eyes. At last he ambled up to the open doorway, and, unbidden, entered. The boys were too tired to drive him out, so he stood unmolested.

Supper over, Happy carefully shaved a

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pile of neat pine slivers and stacked them on the hearth, ready for a morning fire. Then he carefully spread out his water-soaked guide-book to dry by the dying embers. They had found a half-dozen old blankets suspended from the ridge-pole, and had decided to sleep in them rather than chance the wet ones. The rain pattered a monotonous tattoo on the roof, and lulled even Happy into silence. If the truth were known, each boy was quite busy with his own thoughts.

"Going to leave the jack inside?" queried Dwight.

"Sure," said Happy. "Why not,—lots of room."

"If that 'hay-burner' blows his horn in the night, I'm certainly going to declare war," warned Billy. "I'm for putting him out."

"How you going to keep him out?" said Happy. "There's no door. What's the difference?"

All was peaceful for the first hour, and then "Peanuts" began his quiet investigation, for he was nearly starved. However, picking

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was very poor. After he had nosed about everything, he succeeded in knocking over the pile of tin dishes, and Billy got up in disgust and drove him out.

Quiet reigned—at least for an hour. Then things began to happen in that lonely mountain cabin. A dozen huge pack-rats sallied forth to look about. It had been weeks since a camping party had been there and their commissary was low. Now was their chance to replenish. Noiselessly they crept to the open hearth and held a pow-wow; then, as if by agreement, they scattered, each to a different part of the room, to investigate. Like so many burglars they deftly ran their paws over everything, from Happy's hiking-boots to Dwight's new tooth-brush. They sampled the left-over, makeshift biscuits. They slipped noiselessly over the loaded gun and sniffed suspiciously of the leather kodak-case and then returned to report their discoveries. Evidently they were disappointed in the food supply, but rarely had they ever seen such a choice collection of interesting odds and ends.

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The meeting broke up, and each busy, animated shadow began dragging away the article of its choice. First went Bill's extra pair of woollen socks, next Dwight's tooth-brush was hustled off into the inky blackness, and then followed Happy's cap together with his bandanna handkerchief and the kodak.

Two young rats that were just building a new nest under the old sheet-iron stove in the corner promptly appropriated the little pile of fresh pine slivers, not leaving even one. One of Happy's big boots was dragged out of sight and a desperate attempt was made to purloin his underclothes, but fortunately these caught on a rough sliver in the floor and no amount of pulling could tear them loose. After some manœuvering, to make certain that Happy's precious guide-book was not some sort of a new man-made trap,—it was such a curiosity, with its stiff back and moving pages,—the four stealthy burglars determined to have it, and so, setting their sharp teeth firmly into the binding, they began to move slowly away.

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They went about the task as systematically as a group of professional house-movers, and about as effectively. Some even climbed the rough log walls and thoroughly investigated the two sweaters that hung from a rustic peg. Satisfied that they could not get these, they returned to make a last search for food. Then quiet reigned on the mountain.

The cool night breeze, made fresh by its rain bath, slipped into every nook and cranny until the boys snuggled down tight into their all-too-thin covers to keep warm. The moon came up, peeped into the open door, smiled, and passed on over behind the western peaks. The sun came up warm and bright, and peeked in, only to find the tired boys still asleep. Then Happy awoke. With a bound he was out, to touch a match to his little pile of pine slivers that he had so carefully prepared.

"Gone! Yes, every one!"

He looked behind him curiously to see who was there, but there was no one. "Some of Billy's jokes," he said half aloud. "I'll get

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into my boots and never say a word. Where in thunder is my other boot? Say, I didn't leave my underclothes there; and my cap lay right there, I'm positive."

Billy was rolling out now.

"Say, Bill, we've had visitors again. My chips are all gone, one of my boots is gone, and my cap is nowhere to be seen."

"And my bandanna is gone, and my tooth-brush and my kodak ——"

"And my extra socks are missing, and my gloves," growled the third boy. "Say, this is too much. Do you suppose that fool jack has dined on them? If he were a goat, I might believe it, but, say, who else could——"

"And the guide-book is gone, too," groaned Happy.

"The guide-book!" wailed Billy. "Then we'll starve, for I can't remember the descriptions of those edible wild plants. Oh, unhappy day! This is too much!"

"The joys of camping," drawled Dwight. "Nit—me for a vacation at home next time. Happy, you got us into this mess; now it's up

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to you to get us out." Happy looked very sober indeed.

"I don't understand it," he said slowly, "but it looks—to—me—like you fellows had framed one up on me. That mule never ate those things. They're somewhere in the cabin, and you and Billy know where," he said with finality.

"You lie," cried Billy like a flash. He was always a bit hot-headed. "And I'll make you eat those words."

"Then Dwight does," insisted Happy.

"Go easy, Happy," said Dwight, a queer glint in his eye. "I won't take much like that. I was a fool for ever coming—with a boob like you. Take it back or prove it. Whose idea was this 'hay-burner' notion anyway? Take it back, I say!"

Happy defied them both. Billy struck first, and then a lively "free for all" followed. Happy took a sound thrashing, but without a whimper. When they let him up he calmly went out, rounded up "Peanuts," and led him into the disordered room.

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"Well, I suppose we'd better start for home. By taking the cut-off we can get in in one day," said Happy. Both Dwight and Billy were not a little ashamed of themselves, and so set to picking up what was left of the equipment preparatory to packing it.

"Peanuts," however, had also had a remorseful night, and had notions of his own about carrying home that heavy wet pack. Happy led him into the corner, next the old pile of broken chairs, and tied him to a smashed bunk just next to an ancient prospector's stove. The packing began. "Peanuts" pulled and side-stepped, but the boys were in no humor for horse play, and so punched the old donkey about a bit roughly. Finally he had stood it as long as he could, and then he kicked,—once, twice, a dozen times in rapid-fire succession. The boys ducked for cover quickly, for they had learned to have great respect for "Peanuts'" heels.

Crash went the pile of chairs! Clatter-de-bang went the old sheet-iron stove! There was snapping of pine boards, and down tum-

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bled the old bunk. The rats could stand it no longer, and out they swarmed, big ones, little ones, and all. The boys were too excited for speech. "Peanuts" watched them scamper out the door and up the wall and over the table. Then he brayed. It was a bray of triumph. He stood gazing wistfully at the wreckage as Happy sidled up.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he laughed. "Take a squint, will you, guys. There's my boot under the stove and my cap and Dwight's tooth-brush. And, Bill, there's your socks, and, by crackey, there's my pine slivers, every one. And say, gents,—Eureka, Eureka,—yonder's the guide-book, and—and, say, am I seeing things? Well, on my soul, take a peep! If there isn't a pile of potatoes, a half a ham, a side of bacon, and a can of baking powder! Hurray! 'Peanuts,' old boy, you've saved our lives after all. Grub enough for three days at least. Come, let's get packed up and moving. Say, you gents, I'm powerful sorry I rubbed it in so bad a while ago."

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"I—I was a bit hasty, too, Hap," said Bill; and Dwight poked out his hand in a clasp of real fellowship. They were all smiling again.

"Come, let's load the 'hay-burner' and get to going," said Happy. "Here's a ramrod, too, and we can soon get that lead out of the rifle. Let's be moving."

"Peanuts," his fit of anger over, brayed in his sweetest tones and then calmly stood to be packed. Even the "hay-burner" was restless to be on the trail.

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FATE'S GIFT

Story Six

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FATE'S GIFT

Story Six

IT was the day of the long hike; consequently every camper was tired and weary. What a day they had had! The mountains had never been so beautiful, nor had the spirit ever been so good on a long, hard jaunt as it had been on this one. The noonday meal had been cooked in the open by the boys themselves, and such steak as it was, and roasting ears and coffee! The boys had vowed they had never tasted such "eats" before in their lives,—each ear of corn cooked to a golden brown, and real country butter to spread on just as thick as you could make it stick. Some treat, I should say, for any group of boys.

And then there had been the long, strenuous climb up to the old deserted gold mine, strange tales about which they had heard from time to time. Then came a cautious journey into its dark tunnels, each boy carrying a

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lighted candle. How cool and damp the air was, and what a delicious mystery surrounded every side tunnel and cave-in. Every boy's imagination had been busy that day, and, as a result, the journey home and the whole evening had been filled with interesting yarns and questions about the old gold days and gold mines in general.

The Leader of Tent Seven was a great story-teller, and, because he had lived in a gold town in his boyhood, he was constantly being importuned for stories, to say nothing of answers to a thousand questions. Because of this fact, the camp "Chief" suddenly bethought himself to call on Thorndike for the story that evening. He kindly consented, as he always did, and when the "Chief" made the announcement at the fire there were wild and enthusiastic shouts of approval, for full well the boys knew that whatever the yarn was to be, it would be especially appropriate in the light of their day's adventures in the "bowels of the earth."

"Let's have that one you told us two years

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ago, about the old aërial tram and the bear," said an eager-faced boy at his elbow, who had never forgotten the yarn.

Mr. Thorndike had already chosen another, but perhaps he might have to tell two, for such things had happened to him before, so, to please the boy, he changed his plan, and said:

"Boys, this yarn has been a favorite in camps for a number of years. I fear that to some of you it will be old—if a good story ever gets old,—but there are some here who have never heard it, and, frankly, I'm fond of it myself, probably because I know the Henderson boys personally. Come now, let's have a few choice bits of wood for the fire, for, see, we've been so busy chattering that it has all but gone out." A dozen eager lads responded instantly, and in a few moments the darkness had been pushed back again and the circle of light made cheerful by the yellow flames.

The boys drew in close to the cheery blaze, for a cool wind had already sprung up. All the eager faces were turned toward the

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Leader of Seven, who stood with his back to a big old yellow pine, his face almost hidden in the shadows. They waited with breathless interest, and then the story-teller began:

Avery Henderson had been missing just three days. As a result, the little miner's cabin in Golden Bow was a desolate, lonely place. The inhabitants of the scattered mining town had quite completely given him up as lost, for in parties of six they had searched everywhere—they thought—within a radius of several miles of the camp. His disappearance was a complete mystery.

"He's dropped into some old prospect-hole," was the common verdict at the post-office. His two boys, however, were of a different mind, and not satisfied to accept any such theory. Their father was too seasoned a prospector and mountaineer to do any such thing in broad daylight. Secretly they were persuaded there had been some foul play, for Ike Drinkwater was back again, and the boys knew full well that his coming meant further

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trouble for them and their father, for old Ike was a desperate character, and had openly declared war on the whole family the day the district court decided against him on the boundaries of the Midas Placer. He had sworn to get even, and although he had been able to satisfactorily prove an alibi as to his whereabouts the day Henderson disappeared, the boys had their doubts. Ike was morose, and confined his entire comment on the matter to a " good enough for him."

Mrs. Henderson was prostrate and refused to be comforted. How she had pleaded that they take their comfortable stake made from the sale of the Midas claim and move back again to civilization, so that the boys might have some schooling and grow up with some of the privileges that a boy ought to have. Avery had, however, flatly refused. Not that he was not thoroughly interested in his boys, for, indeed, they had always been great pals, but simply because the wind-swept ledges and the lonely quartz-filled canyons held for him an irresistible attraction. He loved the peace

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and quiet of the great stretches of Engleman spruce and the magpie-infested cottonwood bottoms that led into the everlasting hills. He had been born in the shadow of snow-crowned summits, and it was the only world that held any appeal for him.

He had started away as usual in the morning, with his prospecting pack and a bit of lunch. He was prospecting a new outcrag over on Beaver Ridge, he said, and had left in the very best of good spirits, but had failed to return. A careful search of Beaver Ridge brought to light no new prospect-holes of any kind and the boys were puzzled.

Blake, the older of the two, turned to Calvin with a deep questioning in his eyes. "Shall we just stop looking and see what happens?"

"No," replied Calvin; "Mother will never consent to that for a moment. No, we must not give up the search until every canyon has been combed over. I cannot help but feel that Dad is still alive somewhere—needing us badly. You know, last night I had an inspi-

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ration. We haven't been up to the old Gold Horse Claim yet."

"But what on earth would take him there?" protested Blake.

"It is such an out-of-the-way place, that if there has been foul play—you can't tell. A week ago I saw that Mexican Lopez over at the Bow. He hasn't been around here for years,—not since the days of the big strike at the Gold Horse. I saw him but once. There was a time, Jim Conner tells me, when he was in Ike's employ. There may be no connection whatever, but I'm going to see. You mind, don't you, the old air-line tram they used up there to carry the ore across the valley? I don't suppose a hand has touched it for ten years. There are several old cabins and a corral at the far end of the tram. Supposing you go down the trail to Diltz and then come back by the cabins and give them a thorough investigation? The old ladder that leads up the tunnel opening and shaft, I suppose, is all rotted to pieces, but I believe I can get down from the summit. It's a last hope,

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but we can't sit here all day and do nothing. Keep your eyes open, and let's return to the house at six. If one of us does not come back by then, the other will know a discovery has been made and we'll join forces. You take the rifle. I'll take the extra pick. I may need it to make some footholds to get down and back. If you discover anything interesting, say by afternoon, shout. I could hear you, for it can't be two hundred yards across the canyon by the tramway."

So it was agreed, and after encouraging their mother as best they could, they set out on their respective journeys, Blake hitting the lower trail to Diltz, and Calvin setting out for Bald-top. Both boys were weary as could be, for during three days and nights they had searched every favorite haunt of their missing father, stopping only for brief snatches of sleep and a hasty bite to eat. Fortunately they were good climbers and seasoned to it.

While Calvin was the younger, he was the stronger of the two, and so had deliberately

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chosen for himself the difficult end of the journey. As he skillfully worked his way up through the pines and over the kinnikinnick-covered slopes, his mind was busy conjuring up all the possible facts of his father's past history, that, properly woven together, might offer some clew to his mysterious disappearance. Twice he had thought of lying in wait for Ike Drinkwater, suddenly confronting him with a gun, and demanding that he tell where his father was, on penalty of death; but more mature thought had led him to abandon the idea, for if Ike *was* innocent, as he declared he was, it meant the opening up again of an old rankling sore, and possibly the death of one boy or the other. Then, too, he was not unmindful of the fact that many of the old-timers had sided in with Ike in the original squabble over the Midas.

By noon he had reached the twin peak of Bald-top. After a little rest, he struck out for the ragged granite cliff down whose face he must somehow get, in order to reach the shaft of the Gold Horse Claim.

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"Nature sure hid her best treasures in unlikely places," thought the boy, as he reached the crest and looked three hundred feet below him to the near end of the old tram. It looked for all the world like a picture he had seen somewhere of a deserted gold mine in California. There hung the old tram-bucket, rusted red in the years of storm. It sagged perceptibly on the old cable. At the near end was still the bull-wheel over which the cable ran, apparently still as good as the day excited hands had hoisted it into place, preparatory to sending out the richest high-grade ore the entire valley had ever produced. Behind it, in the sheer cliff of cold red granite, opened the famous tunnel that had belched forth its millions of gold as a rich reward for the resourceful man that had successfully overcome every obstacle in getting his prize to market, where scores of experienced engineers had declared it could not be done.

He lay still a long while as he scanned carefully every inch of the narrow cliff and workings below him. He listened, too, with a pair

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of ears trained by long life in the mountains to detect the slightest sounds. Twice he was confident he heard some one moving about below, but could see no signs of life. He was about to halloo, and then, thinking it better to keep his presence secret until he could get nearer, he changed his mind. His eye followed the slender cables that led across the deep, precipitous cleft or canyon to the dump at the farther end. The air was clear and still, and while the cabins were hid from his view, he could see quite plainly the other tram-bucket and the bull-wheel. A crested bluejay sat on the upper cable and addressed the wilderness about him, entirely unconscious of his human audience.

Slowly Calvin began to work his way down over the washed and vine-covered trail. A single slip or false step and he realized full well that he would roll a thousand feet to the canyon below. However, he was a mountain boy, sure-footed as a pack-mule, and had the utmost confidence in his ability to take care of himself. Slowly he descended; nearer and

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nearer he got to the comparatively small ledge from which the tunnel opened. Once again on his way down he had heard the same noise, as if some one were in the mouth of the tunnel. Was it his imagination, or was some one really there? He wished mightily for a gun, and yet his light pick was a splendid weapon for close combat, and in his present nervous state he had no doubt about the ultimate outcome of such an encounter, for he was a desperate boy, willing to hazard all, even life, on the cast of a single die.

What if he should find his father? He had brought no food or drink, and he marvelled at his own thoughtless stupidity. "If he *should* be there," he reasoned, "I could cross the old tram. I'd have to take him out that way, anyhow, for if he is sick or injured, I could never get him up to Bald-top." So, with his thoughts running on wildly, he hastened forward—eager, alert, ready. He was opposite the mouth of the cave now, but he could see no sign of life anywhere. Then suddenly his sharp eye spied fresh tracks in the soft bank

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of tollus at the dump-edge. In an instant wild excitement seized him. Was he on the verge of a great discovery?

He hallooed loudly. The rocky caverns took up the sound and echoed it back at him weirdly. Then from somewhere, deep in that dark recess, he heard a crunching on loose gravel. He hallooed again, and, before he knew it, out bounded a huge, angry, surprised bear. The bear looked at Calvin—Calvin looked at the bear, frozen to the spot. He had never been more surprised in his life, for a bear had not been seen in the vicinity of Golden Bow for several years. The boy looked wildly about him. To retreat up the cliff was foolishness. It was no place for haste. To fight was equally foolish, as what was a mere miner's pick against a huge brute like the one which stood uncertainly before him? To leap off, of course, meant certain death, but, even then, a more pleasant one than being devoured, for likely it would be all over in a few seconds. He stood undecided.

The bear had started toward him. Cal-

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vin's eye caught the hanging tram-bucket, but for the first time he noted that it hung fully eight feet out on the cable. Yet there was no time to consider. It was absolutely his only chance; he must jump for it. The disturbed bear was wild with rage, and would be upon him in less time than it would take to tell of it. He dropped the pick, climbed onto the dump, and, with every muscle tense, made a wild leap for the bucket. He caught it fairly, but so tired was he that it seemed he could not raise himself over the edge. He struggled wildly, and then, to his great horror, the bull-wheel began to move with the stimulation of his impact, and the old rusty bucket began to ride slowly outward. The boy looked down into the yawning canyon below; then, with one superhuman effort, he got a leg over the side. The old bucket tipped threateningly toward him. It was his weight against that of the empty container. What if it should completely tip on its handle?

Somehow he finally got into the bucket, just how he never knew, and then sank ner-

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vously exhausted to the bottom. In a moment or two he became conscious of a wild pawing at the bull-wheel. He carefully raised himself to a standing position and looked back. Before him he saw the irate bear, deprived of its prey, pawing and clawing at the slender cable. He shouted loudly, thinking he might frighten her away, but she simply clawed the more, determined if possible to get at the boy. Each thump on the cable only served to send the great pail with its human freight the further away from safety; and then, with sudden terror, the boy heard a strange, twanging snap. The bucket sagged noticeably, for the old rusty cable was parting, a strand at a time. He was to be plunged to the bottom, then, after all! He stood with his eyes glued to the breaking cable. How long would it take? Then he swooned.

How long he lay a helpless heap in that almost scorching-hot iron container he did not know. When he came to, he thought he must be dead. Then his hand felt the hot bucket. Could he possibly have fallen with the bucket

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to the bottom of the gorge? No, impossible, and still be alive. Cautiously he raised himself. He noted the cables were still above him. He was *still* hanging. He discovered that he was probably three hundred feet from the bull-wheel. The bear was gone, and it would soon be night. He looked about for some means of escape. The upper cable was completely out of his reach. He feared to move about much lest the rusty steel rope would snap. There was nothing for him to do save wait until his brother came. Perhaps that meant all night; but if it meant a week, he was helpless. Furthermore, the problem was how to get him safely to land after they *did* discover him.

He was busy with such thoughts when he heard a gun. Yes, there could be no mistaking it, and it came from the far side of the canyon. It was Blake at the cabins. If he could but make him hear him! He shouted, but his voice died away like the song of a bird in the vast spaces. He tried again and again but got no answer. Yet he heard the

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gun again and then again. Suddenly it dawned upon him what that signal meant. Blake had found interesting information, perhaps. It cheered him wonderfully to think that perhaps they had at last found some trace of his father. Oh, if he only knew for a certainty! Then he called once more, but got no reply.

The shadows were lengthening. The cool evening breeze was rising from the trees and water below. In an hour the sun would set, and then darkness would steal over the valley. At six o'clock *he* would not be there to report. Blake would take that as a sign of distress and come for him at once. But then there was the bear, who had probably retreated into her den to await fresh prey. If they should come onto her suddenly, as he had, what then? His duty was very clear. Exhausted and weak as he was, he must keep watch on the mountain and warn them. They would likely not come till morning, as a trip over Baldtop was a very hazardous night journey. So the boy contented himself as best he could.

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What a night that was! It seemed like a thousand years. A hundred times he dozed, only to waken with a start to find it still night. The sky was set with thousands of twinkling stars. The great half-moon rose curiously, as if bent on peeping in on the weary boy in his plight. He wondered if the angels saw him hanging there in his steel nest, like an oriole in a high elm-tree. He wondered if they had really found his father—and if he was dead—and if he *was* dead, who killed him, and why? He wondered if his tired little mother over in the Bow had been able to stand the shock. He wondered if Ike would be surprised to get the news. He wondered everything imaginable until finally sleep and exhaustion claimed him.

He was wakened with the very first streak of dawn by a voice high on the mountain. No, he was only imagining it. No one could have got there so early in the morning. Then he heard a gun and a shout, and he shouted back. Then he watched the cave-entrance for any signs of the bear. They were coming closer,

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and there were several voices. It was a rescue party.

"Danger, danger!" called Calvin. "A great bear—a bear."

"We're coming," came the faint reply. "Steady, steady."

"A bear, a bear! Danger!" he answered back. It was half an hour before he again heard them. He called his warning. In a few moments he could see Blake's figure outlined on the cliff above the tram. Calvin summoned all his strength, and in slow, careful shouts told his story and gave his warning. Soon the party worked its way down the trail; there were three of them, two miners and his brother. All were armed with rifles, but there was no need, for in the night Bruin had left for parts unknown.

Excitedly the miners examined the partially broken cable and shook their heads.

"There is only one chance in fifty that she'll hold," one said.

"But there's no other way under heaven," the other replied.

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Calvin watched and listened eagerly. They were going to turn the bull-wheel slowly by hand and so work him back toward them. They began operations, but had not moved the great bucket a dozen feet when more strands of the cable gave way. They were taking desperate chances with a more precious cargo than that old pail had ever held, or would ever hold, even filled with all its golden ore.

"It's no go," said Jim Conner at length. "It's certain death. We must find some other way, for we must not lose the boy."

"If he could but get hold of the upper cable," suggested Blake, "that would greatly relieve the strain. I believe the damaged cable would hold the empty bucket."

"But how can he?" questioned Jim.

"There is but one way," said Blake, a tremor in his voice. "If he could climb on top of the bucket, standing on the edge, he could reach it. If he could but clasp the upper cable and lift his weight with his arms, we could pull the bucket toward us a little

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at a time. Perhaps he is not strong enough, but it is our only chance."

They talked it over with Calvin. He realized fully, after his all-night vigil, the seriousness of his position.

"It is six of one and half a dozen of the other," he said with a brave smile. "If I get out at all, it will be Fate's gift. I'll try; but, Blake, before I do, tell me, did you find Father?"

"Yes, Calvin," came the answer; "but he was ——"

"Dead?" questioned Calvin with a sickening sensation.

"No, only seriously hurt—a gun-wound. He is home by now. But—it will kill him, boy, if we lose you. You were the first he asked for. Go steady now, old fellow. It will take nerve to do it, but you must."

Calvin carefully worked his stiff and tired body to the rim of the pail, balancing himself by holding on to the little pulleys that carried the bucket on the lower cable. Then he had an inspiration. Taking off his woolen shirt,

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he carefully folded it and then threw one end over the upper cable, brought it down, and tied it securely into a hard knot. He slipped his arm through this loop and lifted the bulk of his weight from the bucket, signalling them to go ahead and pull. Little by little, the bull-wheel creaking ominously, they pulled Calvin, standing erect on the rim of the pail, slowly but surely back to safety.

Willing hands helped the boy to safely alight, and, all together, they gave a hearty cheer. Jim Conner wiped a tear from his eye with one horny hand, as he slapped Calvin on the back with the other. "You're your father's own son," was his only comment, but Calvin knew what he meant and was glad.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached Golden Bow—a triumphant party.

They met Mrs. Henderson at the gate. "He is much better, boys," she said, smiling through her tears. "Oh, I am so glad you did not give up! He would have undoubtedly died in another twenty-four hours. His gun exploded, he said, while shooting at a huge

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bear up at the Gold Horse Claim. Thought he could kill it from across the little canyon."

"A bear at the Gold Horse Claim!" exclaimed both boys in the same breath.

Their mother nodded.

"I wish he *had* killed it," laughed Calvin nervously; "but as he didn't, I'm going to, if it takes me the rest of my natural life."

"But the *killing* of the bear is another yarn," said the story-teller. "Now it's time to turn in."

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IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN WORSE

Story Seven

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IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN WORSE

Story Seven

IT was stunt night. All day there had been mysterious little get-togethers in the woods and tents, much half-whispered conversation, and not a little energy spent on concocting all sorts of makeshift equipment for the occasion. Here and there a skirt had been seen,—an utterly unheard-of thing in a boys' camp,—and even pink silk tights and a sunbonnet. Grease paint and burnt cork was bringing a high price, and Skinney Jones had even agreed to wash Spike Henry's dishes for a whole week in return for the loan of his mouth-harp for the second act.

The old talking-machine had been ingeniously hidden in the low limbs of a thick tree, to serve as orchestra, and every lantern in camp, including a dozen of "home-made tin-can-and-tallow-candle ones," were arranged as footlights to the stage, which nature had

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kindly supplied in the form of a little green knoll in the woods.

The camp-fire had been arranged well to one side, so as to cast the proper stage-effects with its friendly glimmering, and slabs from the old mill had been strung in rows for seats.

Promptly at the appointed hour the concealed orchestra rendered its curtain-raising selection and soon the show was on. Every amateur in camp that could sing, speak a piece, do a sleight-of-hand trick, or in any wise entertain, appeared one after another, each greeted with wild applause. Just who rendered the best selection would be difficult to determine justly. It was an altogether uproariously happy gang, and all too soon was the program over. However, the fire would still be good for an hour. In fact, it was just at its best—a wonderful heap of glowing embers, with here and there a spiteful bit of blue flame or sudden dash of yellow, as some hidden pitch-pocket would be discovered by the heat and set aflame.

It was all too evident that bedtime was

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not at hand, and so the " Chief," being a wise Leader, suggested that they gather about the lovely old heap of coals and have just one good yarn with which to induce sleep. His proposal met with instant response, and soon the entire company of clowns, painted ladies, sleight-of-hand performers,—all, save the orchestra,—were snuggled into the circle of soft light.

" Boys," began the " Chief," " we've a visitor among us to-night. We're glad he's here. He has another name, of course, but to us he is just Red's father. I've asked him to spin a yarn for us to-night,—one, perhaps, out of his own experience."

The boys were pleased, and greeted the visitor with the usual applause.

" Here's one Red was always fond of," began the visitor, " and perhaps it will interest you, too. Let's call it, ' It Might Have Been Worse ': "

I

" She's a sick mare, that's a plumb certainty," said Hiram Pellet with a shake of

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his head. "It would never, never do to drive her to town to-day."

Gilbert was disappointed. He had counted on that trip to the city, for the early summer's work had been very heavy and he was tired out. Hiram Pellet was fast getting old, and as he was compelled to give up one chore after another, Gilbert took them on without a grumble.

"Well," said the boy with a smile, for he never was given much to grumbling, "I suppose, then, I had better go down to the lower pasture and finish painting the inside of the old water-tank. We'll have to be filling it again now, if you're going to bring the spring calves into the corral. You dope up Nellie and I'll go along." He turned and called the collie dog that was his inseparable pal and comrade. "Come, Tedro; it will be deucedly lonesome down in that pasture alone. You can chase rabbits while I use my mighty right arm." He stopped and patted the dog kindly.

"Then I'll just slip over and finish pick-

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ing those Junes," said Mr. Pellet. "There's about three bushel of 'em yet, and perhaps we can drive in to-morrow."

"But I was going to take the ladder, Dad," said Gilbert. "I can't get into the tank without it, you know."

"Certain sure," said his father thoughtfully. "I'll tell you, son, wait a bit and I'll just go along with you to the tank. You can hand me the ladder out after you're in the tank, and I'll be back with it before you're done. I must get at it and build a new ladder this fall. We need another badly."

The mare was doped, and soon father, son, and dog were on their way toward the big tank in the lower pasture, carrying the only Pellet ladder between them.

"It will be infernal hot in there to-day, son. Better take it a bit easy. When I come back along about noon, I'll just bring you a half-dozen Junes. They'll wet your whistle for you. Nothing like a good June on a hot day."

The old tank stood on an elevator platform

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some twelve feet above the ground, so as to insure pressure to the water-troughs by the lower gate. It was red, as all water-tanks are, and it leaked alarmingly, as most tanks do. Gilbert had painted it every year since he was big enough, and it was the one job of the year that he disliked heartily. Probably that explains why it was always left until the last.

One after another, they climbed the stationary ladder to the base of the tank, and then together hoisted to the rim the loose ladder they had brought.

"Lookin' mighty old," said Hiram as he steadied the ladder for Gilbert to climb to the top. "Some cross old bull is going to bump it over one of these days. Well, we'll make her do this year anyhow. Give the cracks a good thick coat, Gil, and let her go at that. She'll swell some when the water's turned on, you know."

Gilbert was climbing the tank now, and soon sat straddle the top. "She does wiggle considerably, Dad, but she'll be good as new

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when I get through painting her and adding a couple of new braces."

He steadied the ladder as his father climbed to the rim. Then together they pulled it up and let it into the tank. Gil, turning to descend into the red depths, noted Tedro, seated on his haunches, watching the whole performance.

"Dog, I wish you could paint as well as you can pant. We'd make a short job of this." Tedro wagged his tail violently and barked as Gilbert disappeared down into the tank. Once at the bottom he slid the ladder up to his father. "You're getting too old for any such circus stunts," said the boy. "Do be careful as you go down."

"Old, but pretty spry yet," laughed Hiram as he set the ladder and began his descent. Gilbert set at once to stir his paint, for he was anxious to begin. "Better putty up the worst of the cracks, I suppose," he said half aloud, "otherwise it will take a barrel of —— What's that?"

There was a crash, a muttered exclamation,

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and then a long series of groans. The old tank trembled under him. Had a support broken? Had his father fallen? A dozen wild suggestions raced through his mind in a flash. "What if—Father—Oh, Dad," he called at the top of his voice, but there was no reply. Then, like a flash of lightning, it dawned upon Gilbert that he was trapped inside the tank, with absolutely no way to get out—no way to get to his father's help—no way even to see what had happened. Perhaps his father had broken his neck. Oh, why did he let him come? A great wave of self-reproach rushed over him. It was his fault—all his. Why had he been so careless?

"Father! Oh, Father, answer me—answer me, I say! Are you hurt? Are you killed? Dad!" But there was no reply save an occasional moan. Tedro barked wildly. It was an excited, wild yelp that Gilbert had never heard the dog give before.

"Tedro, go home at once," ordered Gilbert. "Go, Tedro, and bring Mother. Make her come; make her come, Tedro. Go." But

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the dog only yelped the more helplessly and refused to obey.

Gilbert stared wildly at the more than six feet of red board wall that surrounded him above his head. "A fly in a trap," he muttered. "No, a fly could walk up those walls. A fool in a trap, that's what,—a teetotal idiot. Talk about climbing into a hole and pulling it in after you. A child would have known better than to have blandly handed out his only way of escape."

It was absolutely no use to call for help, for it was a big quarter of a mile to the farmhouse, and, anyway, Mrs. Pellet believed Hiram and Gilbert well on their way to Centerville. There wasn't one chance in a thousand of any one passing, for the lower pasture was at the far end of the farm from the turnpike. To try to scale the tank was utter foolishness. To break a way out was like breaking out of prison; the walls were secure against even the wildest assault from within.

Once more Gilbert addressed his father, thinking he might have come to, after the

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shock of his fall, but although he shouted again and again, the only reply was a yelping from the dog.

"Tedro, you are seventeen kinds of a fool," cried Gilbert between sobs, for he was sobbing now like a child. "Go home, dog; go home and bring help." Tedro whined piteously but refused absolutely to move from his chosen spot.

"Dog, listen to me," said the boy in all earnestness. "You're Dad's only hope. Do you hear me? Father, he's there somewhere with a broken leg—or neck. I'm imprisoned here, helpless as an infant. You're free, dog. Do hear me—go home to Mother. Bring her here. Catch hold of her skirts, drag her. She will understand, Tedro. I know she will. Tedro, try. There, dog, try; please try, just once."

Tedro whined an understanding whine and then dashed round and round the tank. Somehow he could not decide what to do. Why did Hiram Pellet lay so quiet? Where was Gilbert anyway? Certainly he heard his

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master's voice, but where was his master? Why didn't he show himself? Certainly he was begging him to come back with all his dog vocabulary. Why were men and boys so stupid?

Gilbert sat down to think, but his mind refused to work. He was dazed. His head was going round and round. "Oh, for wings—just for three seconds. What strange experiences come suddenly upon us," he thought, little realizing what an adventure was still in store for him before night.

"If Mother only goes to the barn and finds Nell," he thought, "or if that confounded dog would only obey me and go home, she might be led to investigate. And, by Jingo, we left the pasture-gate open. Like as not, in less than an hour the cattle will all be in, and two rods of the road-fence down. This *is* a mess,—a tragedy, a fool tragedy! Cattle all out, Dad with a broken neck, and me a prisoner.

"Oh, Mother," he called at the top of his voice. "Mother, Mother!" And then, thinking better of it, he changed his distress

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signal to "Help, help—murder!" but he might just as well have saved his breath, for no one was listening save Tedro.

Minutes slipped into hours. The sun looked straight down upon the imprisoned boy and smiled until the great beads of perspiration fairly rolled off his forehead.

Probably his father was dead by now. Think of an injured man being unconscious for four hours in that baking sun! He felt sick himself, for his own stomach was empty. At last, in desperation, he turned again to haranguing the dog, but he might just as well have talked to the stars. Tedro did not understand. There was no definite association between anything the dog knew and the present situation to stimulate him to definite action. If he only understood, how quickly things would happen!

II

Mrs. Pellet hustled out into the yard in the early afternoon, preparatory to her nap, as was her wont, to feed and water the chickens

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and to pull a little green stuff from the garden for the evening meal.

"Land sakes," she exclaimed. "Hi or Gilbert has left that lower pasture-gate open. They do beat all for careless doin's, and, more than likely, them thirsty critters has already gone down into the shade of the old wild cherries, or perhaps out onto the road, who can tell?" She bustled over to the gate, scrutinizing the pathway as she went.

"Just as I suppose—the whole herd in. They know where it's cool—poor brutes. I'm so glad that Gilbert got that tank painted. I must set the windmill and run them water,—poor thirsty critters; it's a hot day with nothing to drink."

With that she bustled back to the little pump-house by the back veranda and threw it into gear; then, with a deft little jerk, she set the three-ways pump so it would feed to the tank on the hill in the lower pasture.

III

Gilbert was startled out of his despondent,

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half-desperate reverie by a sudden dash of cold water on his head. Rain? No, of course not. Was he out of his head? Where'd that water come from? Well, of all things! Yes, he could hear the click, click of the windmill now. Some one had set the pump to going. He looked at the pool of water at his feet, then at the feed-spout above, while a queer, fatalistic glint came into his eye.

"Not only trapped, but drowned in a trap —a trap of my own setting," he mused. "'Double Tragedy on the Pellet Farm,' the papers will read," he said, "and then will follow the details of the awful blunder.

"Poor little Mother," thought the desperate boy. "She will not only be a widow, but she will always be conscious that she drowned her only son, unknowingly." He watched the water slowly rise. It fascinated him. There was several inches of it in the tank now. It would fill to the overflow in less than three hours, allowing amply for the leakage of the cracks. In less than three hours, then, it would all be over.

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"Why do you suppose she set that pump?" he said suddenly; then he remembered the open gate and guessed right. She had seen the cattle coming through, and knew they would be thirsty that sweltering day. She was always so solicitous for the comfort of every living thing on that big farm, from a sick pig to a lame duck. "Poor dear Mother, what a mistake she has made to-day. Yet she may turn it off before I drown. She may,—but not likely. She knows it has to fill more than two-thirds full before the overflow can fill the trough at the tank. Two-thirds is just two feet over my head. Neither I nor any other boy living could possibly float facing that sun until the tank fills. No, there is no use; I'm doomed—doomed to die with a live dog not twenty-five feet away that could save me, perhaps us both, if he only would. Why *are* dogs so stupid?"

The water was to his knees and rising every minute. He called again and again, and then once more he addressed the thoroughly frightened canine, explaining in great

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detail to the animal the gravity of the situation.

Then, acting upon a sudden inspiration, he pulled off his shoes and dropped them, next off came his shirt. If he must swim, he wanted to be unhampered. His hand touched his gold watch. It was the pride of his heart. His uncle had given him that for finishing the junior high school with honors. It was a pity to let it become water soaked. He would wad his trousers together, tie them with his necktie, and throw them out. Even if the watch was jolted, it could be repaired. He'd chance it. In arranging his trousers into a bundle he came onto his big pocket-knife that was always sharp, and then an idea struck him. He'd tap the tank and help the leaks, but if he was going to do that he must get at it, for he could cut only so long as he could stand on the bottom.

Out went his trousers. He heard the bundle light on the platform,—anyway they were safe. How he wished that he had a pencil and some paper, but he had no time. Every

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second was precious. He must cut. He set to his task with a will. Selecting one of the cracks that was widest open on the inside, he began cutting, first on the edge of one board and then the other. The old fir-stave was veritably pickled in oil and paint. It cut like bone, yet the boy toiled on. If he could but cut a hole equal in size to the feed-pipe at the top, perhaps the water would run out as fast as it came in. It might be morning before any help would come, but of course his mother would turn the mill off before she went to bed, for she always did.

A spark of hope at least was born in his breast. He worked like a demon possessed. Slowly the chips dropped and floated on the water. The water was nearly to his hips now. Then suddenly his knife struck something hard—steel. In an instant it dawned upon him. He had been cutting directly behind one of the great three-inch bands of hoop-steel that bound the tank together. Surely he was fated to die; yet he was fully aroused now, and determined that he would not give

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up without one more trial. He crossed to the other side of the tank, and in so doing stepped on one of his water-soaked shoes. Stooping, he picked it up and tossed it out. He heard it hit the ground, and in response Tedro yelped piteously. Then he had another idea. Stooping for the other shoe, he addressed the dog. It was just a chance.

"Tedro, take this home. Take it home, boy, do you hear?" Tedro yelped, made a dash for the falling boot, and with a wild yelp was gone. A connection had been established.

Would his mother come? Perhaps she was asleep—or out in the berry-patch—or upstairs. It seemed as if he could not hold out much longer. Meanwhile he set to work cutting a second hole in the tank. This time he struck a softer stave and cutting was easier. To the tune of the water splashing into the tank from above he carved away, making every stroke count, for the water was now several inches from his waist.

In an incredibly short while Tedro was

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back, yelping as if on the trail of a rabbit—but he came alone.

"You fool pup," growled Gilbert. "What did you do with that shoe? Calmly deposited it on the back porch, I'll wager, and now want more. Well, here goes,—we'll try again." Peeling off both socks, he wadded them together and threw them out. They had hardly touched the ground before the dog was off with them. Gilbert cut away with all his might. In ten minutes more he would have a hole. The first one had taken the edge quite completely off his knife, but he made up for the lack of edge by muscle. Oh, if that water would only stop its ceaseless gurgle as it spilled into the tank. It was fast getting on his nerves.

Tedro was back now, with the usual yelp. "Here's my shirt, dog; take it home—take it to Mother—do you hear?" He smiled grimly in spite of himself as he pictured his pile of soaking-wet clothes on the back porch, probably piled against the screen door, and he about to drown. No, he wasn't going to

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drown, for his hole was nearly through now. And it was going to be a big hole, larger by half than the feed-pipe. How the water would gush out of it. Probably scare Tedro to death, but the fool dog hadn't any brains anyway, or else he would have had the whole neighborhood there to rescue him. There he was again—yelping for more clothes. Off came his underwear,—it was his last chance. He shivered in the cold water in spite of himself.

"Dog, present these with my compliments. They can be sent to the heathen in China or somewhere when the missionary society meets, —I'll never need them again," added the boy very seriously. He tossed them out, and then set to work once more on his hole—the water was just to his armpits. In another half-hour it would be all over.

Suddenly his knife slipped through, and a little streak of bright light leaked in. "Now for the race," he muttered as he quickly cut away the edges, enlarging the crack. The water rushed through the tiny slit like air

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from a punctured tire. Every second it grew in size, for now he could cut to much better advantage. It was as big as a quarter, then as large as a half-dollar, and now the size of an egg. How the water gushed out! He could hear it strike the platform and then drip off in a sort of waterfall. In ten minutes he could see that he was gaining, for already the water had fallen three-quarters of an inch from its former level. He could tell by the wet ring on the inside of the tank.

He heard Tedro again, but he was too busy to pay any attention to a yapping dog. He must cut his hole larger yet, if he was to save himself.

What was that? Yes, he was certain he heard a sound. "Shut up your infernal racket, Tedro," he called. "Lay down—quiet, Tedro." Yes, it was a moan,—a muttered something.

"Dad—oh, my Dad," called the excited boy. "Are you alive?" Tedro drowned out the reply if there was any.

It was but a little while until the water-

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level was down to the bottom of Gilbert's hole. He was not going to drown, that was certain, but he was chilled to the bone, and wild to get to his father. Once again he tried his yells of "Help, help," with Tedro aiding to the fullest of his powers, and then he heard his father talking.

"Yes, Father—a little louder. Are you badly hurt?"

"Leg broken, and oh, my back," came the reply.

"Father, I am so sorry but I can't help you. I can't get out. You send the dog for help. Give him your hat—write a note and fasten it to it, can't you? You see, Dad, you have the ladder and I'm freezing."

It was but a few minutes until Gilbert heard Tedro dashing off over the hill; then he listened to his father.

"Boy, where is all the water coming from? It's drowning me, Gil. Can't you shut it off? It must have been the cold water that brought me back to consciousness. Can't you? Oh, why doesn't some one come?"

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Gilbert considered. Tedro had gone with his father's hat. His own cap lay on the bottom of the tank where he had thrown it. He could plug the hole for probably forty minutes before the water would rise to his neck. Perhaps in those forty minutes help would come. He dived for the cap, and in a jiffy had it wadded into the hole.

Thirty minutes he waited, but he was encouraged, for Tedro had not returned. Then he heard a yelp, and heard his mother calling, "Gilbert, oh, Gilbert." He answered with the most blood-curdling "Help" he could manage.

In a few minutes she was bending over the form of Hiram Pellet, showering the old man with a torrent of questions.

"Pull him out of the way, Mother," called Gilbert, "for I must remove this plug or drown,—the water is up to my shoulders now. Then go home and shut off the mill and bring help—and a ladder, Mother—and—and some clothes; all I have left is my birthday suit. 'Phone for Dr. Mills, and do hurry. Bet-

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ter hitch Jerry to the stone-boat, and together we can get Dad home while the doctor's coming."

Mrs. Pellet obeyed orders as fast as her excited, trembling hands and feet would let her. Gilbert pulled the plug, and the water began to lower. He wondered if he could possibly last till his mother returned, for his teeth were chattering and he ached in every muscle.

Suddenly the water ceased to flow from the supply-pipe, and he knew she had reached the house. Every minute seemed to be an hour, and then he heard Tedro yelping.

"I brought the axe, Gilbert, and a rope," she said. "I'll climb to the platform and throw the rope over. You pull the axe in and then cut your way out, and do hurry. I believe Hiram is dead. Oh, how did it all happen, anyway, and me thinkin' you were safe in the village."

Gilbert set to chopping with a will, and soon knocked out the stave where he had cut the hole, then the one next, and the next one, until he had an opening large enough to crawl

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out of. Quickly he slipped into the overalls his mother had brought, and together they lifted Mr. Pellet to the stone-boat. Tedro yelped with glee, dashing about like a crazy dog.

"Get out, you fool dog," shouted Gilbert angrily. "We'd have been out of this scrape hours ago if you had any sense."

"Any sense, Gilbert?" cried Mrs. Pellet. "Any sense? Why, the dog is 'most human. He scratched the screen off both the back and front doors, and when he could not get in, he finally jumped through the summer-kitchen window. I was sound asleep up-stairs. He brought your father's hat and laid it on my bed, and then licked my face to waken me. The dog has saved your lives."

Gilbert's voice softened, and he called the excited dog to him. "Come here, you fool pup," he said affectionately; "you did make good, after all. I was going to shoot you, but now I'll—I'll build you a new dog-house and feed you a—chicken."

They were at the gate now, and soon

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Hiram Pellet was on the old hair settee, with Dr. Mills working over the fractured leg.

"It might have been worse," said the old doctor reassuringly.

"Yes, much worse," said Gilbert, as he sipped his cup of hot ginger-tea. "But the next time I paint a water-tank it will have to be a new one, and one with a ladder both inside and out."

Tedro yelped sharply, as if to second the motion.

"Yes, it *might* have been worse," whispered Mrs. Pellet; "but, thank heavens, it wasn't. It's bad enough as it is. Oh dear, Gilbert, I'll have to lie down."

Just then the telephone rang and Gilbert responded.

"Cattle in your corn," he said half angry; "well, I'll come for them at once." He hung up the receiver and hurried for the door, muttering as he went, "I ought to have mended that pasture-fence two weeks, ago,—but, shucks, it might have been worse."

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PAT PUTS IT OVER

Story Eight

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PAT PUTS IT OVER

Story Eight

IT was Sunday in camp, but, quite contrary to the notions of some folks, it had been one of the very best days of the entire outing. The weather was perfect, and the whole day had been full of surprises. Of course, a few visitors had drifted in, as they always did on Sunday, but they did not in the least disturb the program.

In the morning the entire camp had climbed to the top of the mountain, and, in the shade of the big cedars that grew there, had played a game of Bible baseball, and then listened to an inspiring talk by one of the visitors.

The chicken dinner, of course, was a big treat; and then the Treasure Hunt, with a fine Testament as the goal, added zest to the afternoon. Bugs Par won, as usual, even if

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he was the smallest boy; but then, he knew the trees and flowers better than any other camper, and so had been able to follow the instructions in the woods to better advantage.

After supper the whole camp, visitors and all, strolled down the valley to the big Beaver Dam, and then, just as near the pond as possible, put up a splendid fire of dry logs. The water caught the red reflection and sent it dancing back. The old pines formed a curtain on the far bank, and the myriads of aspen stumps each resembled boys cuddled up to listen to the songs and the talks.

The "Chief" talked about the stars that night, and how it did make every one think, as they sat there and gazed up at the countless numbers of them that twinkled in the night.

Slowly the fire died down to an enchanting heap of old-rose and violet embers. It was a great pity to go home on such a night and leave such a fire of friendship.

"'Chief,' couldn't we have *one* little story?" asked Billy Evans. "That's the best story-fire we've had this year."

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"Let's do," echoed Shortie.

"Just one, 'Chief,'" urged Tommie.

"Yes, just one," urged all the others.

"I made no plans for a story to-night," said the "Chief," "but I have no objections at all if some one present can accommodate us. Perhaps you might prevail upon Dr. Stone yonder to spin a yarn. He's doctored many a boy in his time, I have no doubt, and probably has had some interesting experiences. Doctor, can't you tell us about the most interesting boy you've ever known?"

The old doctor chuckled aloud.

"Well, I've known quite a few interesting lads," he said. "Supposing I should tell you of an experience I had with a boy scout during the war. It's really a great yarn, and one you'll enjoy; besides, it's true,—it's the story of how Pat Put It Over. Supposing I go back and give you a bit of the setting."

Every boy was eager, and as usual pulled in close about the heap of embers. No story-teller ever had a better or more appreciative audience:

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"You must be tired," said Mrs. Terry as she helped Burgess out of his scout-coat.

"Tired is no name, Mother," smiled back the lad. "But wasn't that parade a beaut? And, Mother, did you see Carl Giddings' dog? He beat anything I ever saw. I'll bet he made folks dig deep. The crowds nearly went wild as he passed, but it didn't seem to bother him a bit."

"What dog, Burgess?" inquired Mrs. Terry. "I didn't see any dog."

"Oh, there were lots of things you didn't see, Momsey," said the lad affectionately. "You were using your handkerchief too much. I had to holler my head off when I passed you to get you to look at me. It was Carl's Irish setter, Pat. You know, the big brown one that is always with him."

"Was that the dog who got the ten-thousand-dollar bond from Judge Barclay in the last drive?" questioned Mrs. Terry, as she arranged the table for tea.

"Yes, and that's how it came that the 'Wolves' beat us, too," replied the boy.

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"But we really had no kick coming, 'cause we're all strong for Pat. None of us have forgotten, I can tell you, how he swam out that time at camp, right in a squall, and brought Bud Barclay safely to shore. I'll just bet that was why the judge gave the dog his subscription."

"But what about the dog and the parade?" urged Mrs. Terry.

"Well, Mother, you know Carl Giddings is sick—has been for ten days. Heard the fellows saying to-day it was pneumonia, and that they had had three doctors last night. Carl is leader of his patrol, and, of course, couldn't march to-day with the rest. But when it came time for the parade formation, who should show up but Pat. He wasn't playful as usual, and absolutely refused to race for a stick. He just kept whining and following Carl's scoutmaster about,—Mr. Jones, you know. Finally it dawned on Mr. Jones what the old fellow wanted.

"'Why, Pat,' he said, 'I know what you want. You've come to take Carl's place in

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the parade. What stupid things we humans all are,' and in a minute Pat leaped up, just like himself again. Mr. Jones got hold of a big silk flag somewhere. Then he took Pat over to the line-up, put the flag in his mouth, and told him to take Carl's place. And he walked right along.

"Of course the 'Wolves' were proud as peacocks, but so were we all. The people cheered and cheered, but Pat paid no attention, just jogged on, with his head in the air. My, he was a beauty! His eyes shone like anything. I'll bet Carl'll be proud of him when he hears of it."

Supper was just started when the door-bell rang. It was Bob Tate, Burgess' pal and a First-Class Scout.

"Special meeting to-night," he said to Burgess. "We're going out to-morrow for repeaters. They're going to extend the contest a day. We went over the top all right, but the national goal's lagging, and we must do more than our share. We've got to beat the 'Wolves,' and, boy, oh boy, it's about a tie

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just now, I'm thinking. Carl is laid up, and he was one of their best workers, so we're giving them a go. We're sorry, of course, that he's sick, but we're going to win this time."

"You bet your life we will," cried Burgess, as he hurriedly ate his sauce. "They trimmed us at basket-ball and in the track-meet, but ——"

"We would have beaten them on the Second Liberty Loan, though," interrupted Bob, "if it hadn't been for Judge Barclay's big subscription."

"Say, Bob, I believe I know how that happened," said Burgess, as the two boys hurried out the door. "Don't you suppose it was because Pat saved young Barclay from drowning last summer at camp? You know the judge had already bought fifty thousand dollars' worth of bonds before Carl went to see him."

"Yes, but Carl would never have thought of going to Judge Barclay if the judge hadn't 'phoned for him to come and to be sure to bring the dog," declared Bob. "Did you

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ever hear about what the judge did? I heard the scoutmasters talking about it. The old judge looked straight into Pat's eyes and said, 'Pat, old fellow, if it hadn't been for you, I'd have no boys at all to-night. A German shell got my big lad a few days ago, and if you had let Bud drown, I'd be a lonesome old man to-night. I've decided to buy a few more bonds, and I want to buy them of you.' He patted Pat's head and Pat barked, as he always does when you speak to him, just to let you know he understands you perfectly. Then the old judge wrote a check for ten thousand dollars, sealed it in an envelope, and told Pat to take care of it and to put it in his mouth. Pat carried it all the way to Headquarters and the 'Wolves' won. Carl was too pleased for any use, and the boys all chipped in and bought Pat a new collar."

"Well, in a way it was luck," said Burgess, as they went into Headquarters, "and it won't happen again, for the judge has gone absolutely his limit. He told my father so, and, besides, Carl is sick in bed."

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It was very quiet at the Giddings home that night. Everything was dark but the big front bedroom up-stairs and the front-hall light. Pat had made numerous trips to the back door, and had scratched patiently in his accustomed manner, but there had been no response. It puzzled him, for he had belonged to the Giddings family almost as long as Carl himself, and in all that time he couldn't remember that they had ever forgotten to give him his supper. He was especially hungry, too, after his long walk through the hot, crowded street in the Bond parade.

Finally he lay down on the front step, his head between his paws and a deeply puzzled expression in his eyes. For seven days he hadn't seen his beloved Carl. Every time the door had opened he had sprung to his feet, but each time Mrs. Giddings had said, "No, Pat, you mustn't disturb Carl." He had eyed closely the strange little man with the black satchel who came twice each day. He had smelled the odorous black medicine-case, and somehow it had frightened him.

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At nine o'clock that evening two strange machines came, each bringing doctors, and in a few moments a big taxi left at the door Mr. Giddings, who had been East on business, but had been hastily summoned home. He hurried into the house without so much as noticing Pat, pleading to be let in. Up the stairs he went, three at a time, leaving the front door open. Pat gazed after him through the screen-door, but all he could hear was a "Sh-h-h, John." Then there was the soft closing of a door, and he was left alone again.

Half an hour later—it had seemed a long time to Pat—Mr. Giddings and the two doctors stepped quietly onto the veranda.

"And what is your judgment, Dr. Stone?" asked the father anxiously.

"He is a very sick lad. He is naturally very intense, and has been working under a great strain. Doubtless he has worried about his brother's going to war. I think the crisis will come before morning; if not, surely by noon to-morrow. I'm glad you've come. I'm

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dead for rest. I must go to bed, but if the lad gets worse, call me. Dr. Ellington says we are doing all that medical science can do, and must now trust to the boy's natural vitality to save him. But what's all the bond stuff he keeps talking?" he asked curiously. "He seems to have some burden on his mind, some important thing he was to do and couldn't."

"Been selling bonds," said Mr. Giddings, "and he is so intense. There has always been great rivalry between his patrol and the 'Eagles.' He is Patrol Leader of the 'Wolves,' and I presume he's been feeling great responsibility for their success."

"Hasn't he a pal," questioned the doctor, "who could talk to him and put his mind at rest? Who is his bosom friend?"

"Here he is," said Mr. Giddings. "Pat here is his best pal, but he doesn't know much about bond-sales, I guess, although he's a good deal of a scout, the boys tell me."

Mr. Giddings leaned over and stroked Pat's head.

"So this is 'Pat' the lad has been talking

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about, eh? Well, John, I'd take the dog up, and if the lad grows restless, let him see him and stroke him. It will comfort him, and will tend to divert his mind from worry about the bonds. Cheer up, John, and hope for the best. Good-night."

Mr. Giddings turned slowly to the door, called to Pat to follow, and the two quietly climbed the carpeted stairs.

"Now you must be quiet, Pat," cautioned the nervous father. Pat understood and wagged his tail. Everywhere he smelled the hateful smell of the little black satchel. Mrs. Giddings, tired and red-eyed, would have sent him out, but her husband explained the doctor's suggestion.

In one corner was the low white bed. Buried deep in the covers lay Carl, his hair disheveled, his eyes sunken and dazed, his cheeks red with fever. One arm was thrown restlessly across the pillow. Pat took one long look, and then, quietly as a shadow, he slipped over, and, before any one could stop him, gently licked the hot, outstretched hand.

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"Lie down, Pat," came the order, and he instantly obeyed.

Slowly the night wore away. Mrs. Giddings, worn out with many long nights of watching, fell asleep in spite of herself, but Mr. Giddings sat by the bedside, watching eagerly for any change. By his side was Pat, also alert. Several times Mr. Giddings spoke to him.

"We must not let him go, Pat," he said over and over again; "for with Jess 'somewhere in France' we need him, don't we?" Pat gently beat a tattoo on the floor with his tail and licked Mr. Giddings' hand.

It was early morning when Carl suddenly sat up in bed, his boyish face scarlet with fever and his eyes wild.

"But the 'Eagles' will win," he cried, "and I must go. Judge Barclay promised me. Why, oh, why, do you keep me here? We must go over the top! Bonds, thrift-stamps, Germans, see them, see, see ——"

Mr. Giddings was quieting him as best he could, while Pat stood looking mutely into

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his comrade's face, wondering why he did not speak to him.

"It's all right, my boy; it's all right. We'll take care of the 'Eagles,' Pat and I. There now, quiet; that's it; there, there, boy."

"Pat and you," said Carl with a relaxed laugh. "Then Pat hasn't gone to France? Where is he? Pat, Pat," he called.

Mr. Giddings seized the dog by the collar just in time to save a scene, for he was completely overjoyed at hearing his name, and bounded up on the bed with his fore-feet, eager to lick his young master's flushed face. Carl looked into the dog's eyes, reached out his hand, patted him listlessly a time or two, and then sank back, muttering unintelligibly about bonds, the "Eagle" Patrol, and his brother, Jess.

But it seemed to Mr. Giddings that the boy rested better from that time until morning. Then, with the first warm rays of sunshine, Carl opened his eyes again and gazed into his father's face.

"Why, Dad, you here?" he asked weakly.

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"I've wanted you and Pat—where is Pat? I've dreamed such awful things had happened to him."

Pat was instantly on his feet and doing his best to say good-morning.

"Well, old fellow," Carl whispered; then he closed his eyes again, but kept his extended hand still on the dog's head, as if fearing he might go and leave him. Pat whined softly. Mr. Giddings' heart rejoiced, for there could be no doubt that the lad was better. He gently wakened Carl's mother and told her what had happened, and she fairly hugged Pat in her relief.

About nine Carl again opened his eyes, but this time his face was troubled and he thrashed about restlessly.

"What is it, my boy?" asked his father softly. "Is something bothering you?"

"To-day is the Bond parade, isn't it, Father?" he asked faintly.

"No, son, it was yesterday." But a second later he was sorry he had told him, for, like a flash, the boy sat up and burst into a

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torrent of tears. "Then I've missed it! Oh, Daddy, I've missed the biggest thing in my life, and me Patrol Leader. I suppose the 'Eagles' have won, too?"

Just then Mrs. Giddings came in with the morning paper, her face beaming, to read from the front page an item which told in glowing words how Pat's master, one of the best of all the Scout salesmen in the former drive, was seriously ill, and how the dog had, of his own accord, reported in the boy's place. The bond contest would run another day, it said, because the Scouts' quota had not been raised.

Together they all rejoiced, and quite overwhelmed Pat with petting. Suddenly Carl had an inspiration.

He dictated slowly and with effort:

DEAR JUDGE BARCLAY,—

I'm so disappointed that I've been sick. I could not even march in the parade, but I remember you told me if I needed more points to make the "Wolves" win, you'd help me. The score is about a tie, and the contest

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closes to-night. If you can buy more bonds so as to help Uncle Sam whip the Germans, I'll be a happy boy. You can give your check to Pat, and he will not fail you.

Yours for Uncle Sam,
CARL GIDDINGS.

Pat was told exactly what to do, and started on his mission. Ten minutes later the 'phone rang, and Judge Barclay reported that he was sending a check for one hundred fifty-dollar bonds. He hoped Carl was better, and concluded by saying that he would like to buy Pat.

"Not for a million dollars," laughed Carl weakly. "Dad, you tell him."

The receiver had hardly been on the hook a minute when the Scout Executive called, asked after Carl's health, and then delivered a message that was worth all the pills in the doctor's ill-smelling case. Twenty-seven subscriptions for bonds had been 'phoned in to the Scout Headquarters already that morning to Carl's credit as the result of the story in the paper.

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"And Judge Barclay's bonds aren't in yet," chuckled Carl.

The doctor came at ten, and could hardly believe his eyes when he saw Carl. He demanded an explanation.

"John, it's wonderful," he said. "I doubted last night if we'd save the boy."

"There is your explanation sitting on his haunches," smiled Mrs. Giddings.

"But, my lad, this is to be an exciting day," the doctor admonished Carl. "You aren't entirely out of danger yet, and you must be just as quiet as a mouse until four. Then you can talk some more. By the way, I'm going to buy a couple of five-hundred-dollar bonds myself, and I want to get them through Pat."

Carl smiled, and Pat rapped on the floor vigorously with his tail.

At five o'clock Mr. Burgess reported Carl's sales and added his own subscription. At six o'clock the Executive called, and said the "Wolves" had won by a good margin. The "Eagles" could not understand how it hap-

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pened, so he had just painted a crude sign and hung it on the bulletin board above the "Wolves'" score. It read:

"Pat Did It."
"A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed."

"There was never anything truer," said Carl, and he laid his hand affectionately on the dog's silky head.

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THE LAST NIGHT

Story Nine

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THE LAST NIGHT

Story Nine

THE time had come to go home. The camping-days were over. All day long the boys had been busy getting things together, packing duffle-bags and cleaning up their litter, for after breakfast the next day they were to return again to the routine of civilization and to city ways. Soon their camp-days would be a memory, but one they would always treasure.

The last camp-fire was, of course, to be a big one, and there was much to do in the way of awarding the season's medals and honors. Then, every boy was to tell briefly what the camp had meant to him, and there was to be organized a Boosters' Club to help boost for next season.

Everything had been a great success,—no one seriously ill, no serious injuries, no bad

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feelings, every boy happy and contented and glad he had come.

The program over, most of the boys had slipped away to their tents, for they were a weary lot after their day of labor. However, a few of the older boys had asked special permission to sleep about the camp-fire that night, and their request had been granted. They gathered about, now, each with his own blankets, and then settled down for a last little chat before they should sleep.

The great fire had burned low; in fact, there was scarcely anything left of it save a smouldering heap of old-rose embers that would start up now and again with a yellow glare, as if to see if the circle of friendly faces still sat close; satisfied that they were there and awake, it would quietly die down again in peaceful repose. It was already past bed-time, but everybody was in reminiscent mood and sleep was far, far away. The spirit of fellowship was enticing, and, of course, a story or two was inevitable.

"But animals do think, anyway," declared

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Tommie with a note of finality. "Some of 'em, at least. I'm not prepared to argue just how much intelligence each variety has, but some of them think, 'cause I've *seen* 'em do it."

"You mean you have seen evidences of their intellect," corrected Billy Evans, who was always a stickler for exactness.

"Yes, I have," declared Tom. "You can argue about the sixth sense and about the wonders of instinct all you like, but you can't fool me about my very own dog. I tell you he thinks. *I've* seen him."

John Andrews rolled the last choice pitch-stump on the embers, and in a few seconds the night had been pushed back again out of our pine-fringed circle, and the boys were all ready for a new round of talk. Of course Tom led off. He usually did, for he had ideas of his own.

"Spike had more brains than a lot of boys I know, and he knew how to use 'em, too. I could tell you stories about him and Towser all night to prove my point."

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"Well," drawled a half-reclining, comfortable-looking chap, "let 'er go. I'm listening. What did the aforementioned Spike do, drive an auto or tell time by the sun? I'm listening."

There was a merry laugh all round, and then Tom began:

"Well, for instance, last summer, when we went on our pack-trip, we took a young pup along that was absolutely green to the trail. He got us into no end of trouble, and finally Spike took him in hand, to teach him how a pup should behave on a hike. One day we came to a badly swollen stream, and the only way to cross was on a rather teetery old down-log. Spike slipped across like a shadow and then barked for the pup to follow. Cautiously he ventured out, and when he was half-way across he lost his nerve and attempted to turn back. Of course he fell off, head first, into that foaming water. He let out one agonizing yelp and was gone from sight. Spike leaped onto a big rock, studied

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the water for an instant, and then struck off down-stream like a streak. He went through the brush like a grey squirrel. A hundred yards down-stream, where the water spread out a bit, he waded in and waited. Soon he spotted the tumbling, helpless pup coming down the rapids like a chip. He made one dive, grabbed that pup in his teeth, and dragged him out, the most frightened bit of dog-meat you ever beheld. Spike licked him a bit and wagged his tail and said plain as day, 'There, you big boob, you aren't hurt. What you whining about anyway? You really needed a bath; now, come along here.' All this time we three boys stood wondering what on earth to do about the pup.

"Spike would retrieve anything. He'd never fail. Once I threw a stick, and it happened to strike a low-hanging limb and fell directly into the fire. Spike was puzzled for a moment or two, but he was used to thinking his way out. After circling the fire twice, he deliberately turned tail and scratched wet pine-needles and other litter into that fire

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until he was able to get hold of the end of that stick with his teeth. He brought it proudly, and when he laid it down at my feet, he said, plain as day, 'Fooled you, didn't I, kid?'

"Only this fall we were duck-hunting. I shot several ducks pretty far out, and Spike retrieved them all save one. I sent him back three times for that duck, and he would swim out, smell it over, and then come in without it. Later in the day I went out with a boat to see why he wouldn't touch it. It proved to be a mud-hen, and Spike knew I never took them.

"We'd have lost him on that trip if it hadn't been for his brains. This is the time I *saw him think*. The pond was too wide to swim the entire distance in the cold water, so Spike, instead of going up around the lake, crossed over on a long railroad bridge that saved him a long trip. He got his bird and was coming back when the evening express slid round the curve and onto the bridge. My heart jumped into my mouth. The train could not stop if it would, and there was no

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chance in the world for Spike to beat it across. He was just half-way over when he saw the thing coming. He stopped, seemed to judge the time he had, and then deliberately leaped to a water-barrel at the side of the track, clinging onto the top with his fore-paws until the train passed. He never even dropped his bird. When he came to me he was ashamed that he had been caught on the track, and crept to me with his ears down and his tail between his legs, as if he expected a good scolding. Did he lose his head, like you and I would have? Not Spike; he used his brains."

"But that was just one dog," drawled the skeptic. "That don't prove that all dogs think."

"Suppose not," retorted Tom, "but all humans don't either. But take Towser; you've seen him,—ugly little Airedale, but wise as a dictionary. Last spring his master shipped him home by express, one time, instead of checking him as usual. The expressman delivered the dog at the house, and the beast

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could not understand. He went into every room in the house, looking for his master, and finally returned to the station and stayed there all day. As soon as a train would pull in, Towser would board her and smell through every coach. He stayed there two days without food until his master finally arrived."

"I read in the paper only yesterday," said another voice across the circle of light, "how a sheep-dog in Montana had fought off the wolves from his dead master's body for twelve days while the Mexican herder had gone for help. Twelve days without food. He knew full well that if he left that body a second, the wolves would tear it to shreds."

"I believe they do think," volunteered another timid listener. "I remember last summer, when I was on the farm, I saw a funny sight,—two animals trying to outthink each other. The old shepherd-dog picked up a rabbit-scent down a furrow which ran up over a ridge. When the dog was in the hollow and could not see over the crest, the rabbit would leap sideways about six furrows and

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then lay still till the dog had gone by. Twice that happened the same morning, and then the dog lay down to think it all over. In the evening he picked up the scent again and gave chase. The rabbit rushed off pell-mell, but the dog, instead of following, as quickly retreated to the other side of the ravine from the high ground over which he had just come, and from which he could see just where the rabbit settled into the weeds. He then circled, came up from the side, and pounced upon the surprised rabbit. It certainly looked as if the dog had thought that play out."

"I've never seen a dog think that I can remember of," said Shortie, "but I've seen birds show glimmerings of intellect more than once. I saw an obstreperous young kingbird that had ventured too far out on a limb away from its nest, and the mother brought it all the way back to safety by coaxing it along with a big luscious worm. And another time I saw a blackbird try to turn over a bit of board in the barnyard for worms and bugs. She tried a dozen times and failed, and then

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went for her mate. Together they turned it over, and together joined the feast."

"I saw an instance of wild-animal brains on our last hike," said another lad. "I came unexpectedly onto a fox squirrel perched low in a small aspen. I grabbed the aspen and shook it violently. Of course, out flipped Mr. Squirrel, jabbering like a train-load of magpies. Then up he went into a tree fully fifteen inches in diameter and darted down the trunk just barely out of reach. There he sat, jerking his tail and laughing as much as to say, 'Shake me out of this one, old boy, you're so big and mighty—I dare you!' He had me beaten, and I left him alone."

"Well, I've seen wasps think several times," said Bugs Par, who was an embryo "bugologist." "I've seen mud-daubers bring water with which to soften the clay for their houses, and I've seen them often select a flat stone, after they have poked their nest full of dead spiders and covered it up, with which to top down the fresh ground of the tiny mound. Once I saw a steel-blue wasp

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endeavor to carry off a dead horse-fly, but the wings had dried outspread, and every time the wasp would try to rise with her load, the expanse of wings on the dead fly would turn her over and bear her to the earth. After several attempts the little wasp deliberately cut the wings off and made away with her prize with ease. I once saw a wasp trying to carry a huge caterpillar, but it was twice too much for her; finally she quit trying to carry the worm, but just rolled it over and over, like a log, until she got it where she wanted it."

"Speaking of wasps," said the "Chief" kindly, for he had slipped up to listen to the yarns, "Darwin tells a story of an experiment he tried to see if monkeys could reason. He wrapped numerous lumps of sugar inside of tiny paper boxes and gave them, one at a time, to the monkey. Carefully the little animal would open them—one after another—to get the sugar. Finally he was given a package in which was a live wasp instead of sugar. The wasp promptly stung the inquisitive monkey on the nose, whereupon the monkey

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would have nothing more to do with the additional packages. However, the next day his curiosity got the better of him, and he once more began to open the packages offered, but each time, before opening one, he would hold it to his ear, to see what he could hear. He selected the two packages in which were wasps, and tossed them out of the cage, after which he calmly opened the remaining boxes and enjoyed the feast.

"I once saw another funny thing," continued the "Chief," as he seated himself preparatory to staying a while. "I'm not certain you'd call it brains, but it might have been. I saw a big toad in our garden bury himself in the loose dirt very near a half-rotten apple. He arranged himself so that his head was hardly an inch from the rotten fruit. As fast as flies would light on that apple his head would pop out of that dirt like lightning, and out would come his long tongue and the flies were no more. I watched him catch upwards of twenty flies in that fashion, and then he went to sleep. I moved the apple, and the

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same afternoon I found Mr. Toad up to some tricks on the other side of the yard where I had tossed the fruit.

"The most remarkable story of animal intelligence I have ever heard is told by Dr. Ramanes in his book on 'Animal Intelligence.' He says that laborers upon a certain occasion left a jug of honey in a closet in which was a pile of old plaster. The rats located the sweet liquid, but could not climb the glazed sides of the jug. When they would leap on the jug, their own impact against the smooth surface sent them sprawling. Finally they piled up the bits of plaster until they could get to the opening, only to find that the honey was too low to reach. After a parley they then deliberately dropped enough plaster into the jug to cause the honey to overflow. That certainly proves that rats have intelligence."

The fire was nothing but a faint glow. The night wind had crept in. Some one's teeth chattered, and then the boy with the quiet drawl remarked: "If we were animals, we'd have brains enough to go to bed. Old

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Spike would have been cuddled away an hour ago. Let's go."

All agreed that Tom had won the argument, and no doubt all the little party determined that night to keep their eyes open in the future for other evidence. The big moon crept into the sky. A grey owl gazed curiously down on the slumbering party. A coyote slunk by in the darkness, but not even Tom was awake to see if the wary beast showed any intelligence. He was too busy dreaming of home.

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